

ISLAND *of* Light



Buddhism in Sri Lanka

A Concise History and
Guide to its Sacred Sites

T Y Lee

Foreword by Ven. P. Gnanarama Ph.D.

BUDDHISM

Dana ————— Practice **generosity** by helping others.

Sila ————— Cultivate **morality** by observing the Five Precepts.*

Bhavana ——— Acquire wisdom through **meditation**.

*The Five Precepts

1. To abstain from harming or killing any living beings.
2. To abstain from taking what is not given.
3. To abstain from sexual misconduct.
4. To abstain from lying and false speech.
5. To abstain from the abusive consumption of intoxicants and drugs.

ISLAND
of
Light

Buddhism in Sri Lanka

A Concise History and
Guide to its Sacred Sites

T Y Lee

Foreword by Ven. P. Gnanarama Ph.D.

Designed by
Geelyn Lim
Qzee Creations
Email: geelynlim@qzeecreations.com

Provided it is done without any changes to the text, this book may be translated, reproduced or reprinted in whole or in part without seeking permission. However, the author would appreciate being informed by email: **admin@justbegood.net**

All rights reserved
T Y Lee
Singapore, 2010

FOR FREE DISTRIBUTION ONLY

ISBN 978-981-08-2666-6

Jaffna

N



Trincomalee

Anuradhapura

SRI LANKA

Sigiriya Polonnaruwa

Dambulla

Matale

Yapahuwa

Kandy

Negombo

COLOMBO

Sri Pada

Kotte



CONTENTS

Foreword	6
Preface	8
Introduction	11
Part One	13
Legends and Chronicles	14
The Arrival of Buddhism	17
The Ancient Kings : Anuradhapura	22
The Medieval Kings : Polonnaruwa and Kotte	31
Buddhism and the Portuguese	37
Buddhism and the Dutch	42
Buddhism and the British	47
The Buddhist-Christian Debates	51
The Buddhist Revival	56
Up To The Present	62

CONTENTS

Part Two	71
Yapahuwa	72
Avukana	75
Anuradhapura	77
Mihintale	89
Sigiriya	97
Polonnaruwa	105
Dambulla	111
Kandy	114
Aluvihara	120
Sri Pada	124
Colombo	130
Conclusion	133
References	135

FOREWORD

The book “Island of Light” authored by Mr. T.Y. Lee covers both the secular and religious history of Sri Lanka from its early historical beginnings up to the present day. I am glad to mention that with a thorough grasp and in-depth understanding of the vicissitudes of Sri Lankan politics and religion, the author has given a comprehensive and panoramic view of the island's history in chronological sequence.

Initially, the author's main focus of attention is its cultural history, which certainly cannot be separated from the Buddhist history of this island called the “Pearl in the Indian Ocean”. Hence, he begins his work with a brief survey of the Buddha's visits to Sri Lanka and then proceeds to provide the reader with a short but very comprehensive introduction of the original historical sources, which helped even the early European and Indian historians to decipher the historical events of the subcontinent of India correctly.

While documenting the internal dissensions that erupted from time to time, the author also has dealt with the fate of the country under the constant South Indian invasions, which compelled the rulers to gradually shift the capital from the central provinces to the south west. At the beginning of the 16th century, the Portuguese invasion was followed by the Dutch and the British invasions. The British ruled the country until Sri Lanka managed to attain

its independence from their yoke in 1948. Dealing with the numerous facets of the revival of Buddhism in the modern era and the pioneers of the revivalist movement, the author exhibits his proficiency not only of ancient Sri Lankan history, but with its recent developments as well.

He has also described many important sacred places with their historical backgrounds. He presents his thesis under discussion quite dexterously in simple and lucid language. The scenic beauty of the photographs of religious and historical importance in Part II is a fitting conclusion to the book. As the author says, these photographs speak for themselves of the grandeur of the historical past of Sri Lanka.

Being an informative guide, a fountain of pious emotion and a source of history, "Island of Light" is a useful guide for tourists, an intimate companion for pilgrims and a factual reference book for students of the Buddhist history of Sri Lanka.

Ven. P. Gnanarama Thera

Ph.D.; D. Litt. (Hon)

Principal

Buddhist and Pali College of Singapore, Singapore

PREFACE

This book is written in tribute to the people of Sri Lanka for their contribution to the preservation and spread of Buddhism within their own island and beyond. Buddhists everywhere have reason to be grateful for the hard work and courage of the Sri Lankan people. This is especially so for the missionary monks who have gone forth beyond their shores to spread the Buddha's teachings, bringing peace and happiness to countless people all over the world.

With my utmost gratitude, I would like to dedicate this book to two such missionary monks who have had an enormous influence in my life, and on so many others in the region and afar. These two esteemed figures fully epitomized the missionary monks of the Buddha's time, who went forth sharing His Teachings with all who would listen.

The first is the late Ven. Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda who wrote numerous books in English, explaining the Dhamma in an easy-to-understand, practical and down-to-earth way. His writings were among the first Buddhist books that I read and which had a profound effect on my life. Needless to say, his books influenced and inspired my own writings.

The second is the late Ven. M.M. Mahaweera Maha Nayaka Thera who founded the Mangala Vihara Buddhist Temple in Singapore and who also started the Buddhist and Pali College on the same premises. It is at these two institutions that I acquired most of my Buddhist knowledge. If not for him, I would be

a totally different and a far less happy and fulfilled individual than I am now.

For the benefit of those who are unfamiliar with Ven. Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda and Ven. M.M. Mahaweera, I have written briefly about them on pages 69 and 70 of this book. Sadly, I was not fortunate enough to meet them personally before they passed away, but I am sure they would have enjoyed this book if they were still alive to read it.

This book is not meant to be an academic treatise and I will not derive any financial benefit from it. It is written as a Gift of the Dhamma. I simply wish to share with anyone interested, my knowledge of the Buddhist history of Sri Lanka and its sacred sites, and I have tried to present this information in a concise and easily readable manner.

Therefore, I would recommend serious students and those with keen interest, to look into other books which are more authoritative and which go into greater detail in their respective areas. For this purpose, I have provided a list of suggested reading and my references on page 135. To the writers of all the wonderful books and articles that I have learned from and relied upon, I would like to convey my earnest gratitude and thanks.

For those wishing to look deeper, the books that I have referred to extensively are “History of Buddhism in Sri Lanka” by Walpola Rahula, “State of Buddhism in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) as Depicted in the Pali Chronicles” by Sandhya Bhattacharya, “Buddhism in Sri Lanka, A Short History” by H.R Perera, and “A History of Sri Lanka” by K.M. de Silva. For the historical Buddhist sites of the island, I would highly recommend “Sacred Island, A Buddhist Pilgrim’s Guide to Sri Lanka” by Ven. S. Dhammika.

For specific sections including the Buddhist-Christian Debates and the Buddhist Revival, I have referred, among other sources, to “Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750-1900” by Kitsiri Malalgoda, “The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka” by George D. Bond, “Buddhism Transformed” by Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere, and “Vain Debates, The Buddhist-Christian Controversies of Nineteenth Century Ceylon” by R.F. Young, and G.P.V. Somaratna.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Ven. Dr. P. Gnanarama Thero for his kind encouragement and for writing the Foreword to this book. My heartfelt thanks go to Ven. S. Dhammika who very patiently went through the text and suggested many improvements and ideas. I am also grateful to Ven. Apichatto Bhikkhu for helping me to polish the language and grammar in the book, Sis. Jasmine Tan for her meticulous proofreading and Ms. Geelyn Lim for her superb work on its design and layout. However, any mistakes, errors and omissions are mine and mine alone.

May all Beings be safe from harm.
May all Beings be healthy.
May all Beings be happy.
May all Beings be free from physical and
mental suffering.
May all Beings be free from greed, hatred
and delusion.

T Y Lee
www.justbegood.net

Diploma in Buddhism, Sri Lanka
Bachelor of Law (Hons), UK
Master of Business Administration, USA


INTRODUCTION

To anyone who has not delved into its history, it may appear that Buddhism in Sri Lanka has always been as strong and unshakeable in its past, as it is now. During the course of my Buddhist studies, I was surprised to discover that Buddhism, although firm and well established in the present day, went through numerous periods of decline and revival since it first came to the island more than 2,000 years ago.

It was almost eradicated by foreign invaders and hostile kings in its early history. It survived and prospered for a time, and then faced enormous pressure from the colonial rule of the Christian superpowers. Close to extinction more than once, it was able to recover each time. These recoveries were made through the efforts of several truly noteworthy individuals, sometimes with the help of the Buddhists from Burma and Thailand, and during the 19th century, Buddhists from the West.

Because it survived and flourished in Sri Lanka, Sinhalese monks in turn helped Burma and Thailand to revive and strengthen Buddhism in their own countries, when it underwent periods of corruption and decline. All these factors subsequently resulted in Theravada Buddhism spreading from these three countries to the rest of the world, including the neighbouring countries of Malaysia and Singapore.

Sri Lanka is the bedrock of Theravada Buddhism, the tradition closest to the original teachings of the Buddha. If not for its survival and growth in this



country, much of the early teachings would have been lost and Theravada Buddhism would be far less prominent and widespread than it is now.

I have summarized the main points of these historical events in Part One of this book, ending with some of the more recent developments of Buddhism on the island.

Part Two is a record of a journey I took with a group of like-minded friends, to visit its ancient Buddhist sites. I came away utterly impressed with the beauty and sometimes sheer scale of many of these places. The locations are in the order of our visits and apart from short descriptions of these sites, I have let our photographs speak for themselves.

Although nothing can take the place of seeing these magnificent places and sensing their historical importance in person, I hope to convey some feeling of this experience through the descriptions and photographs in this book. Hopefully, more people will be inspired to make a pilgrimage to Sri Lanka to enjoy these ancient and often breathtaking sites, and experience for themselves the sacred atmosphere in many of these places.

Front cover : Mahaseya Stupa, Mihintale
Back cover : Gal Vihara, Polonnaruwa



PART ONE

- Legends and Chronicles
- The Arrival of Buddhism
- The Ancient Kings : Anuradhapura
- The Medieval Kings : Polonnaruwa and Kotte
- Buddhism and the Portuguese
- Buddhism and the Dutch
- Buddhism and the British
- The Buddhist-Christian Debates
- The Buddhist Revival
- Up To The Present



Legends and Chronicles

The Buddha's Three Visits to Sri Lanka

In the traditional legends of Sri Lanka, the Buddha made three visits to the island in the course of his life. The Pali canonical texts however, make no mention of these visits. According to the legends, the Buddha made these visits because he foresaw the decline of his teachings in India and wished to see it survive and flourish in Sri Lanka.

The Buddha made his first trip nine months after his enlightenment, arriving in a place called Mahiyangana. During this visit, the supernatural beings inhabiting the island known as the Yaksas, Raksas and Nagas, embraced Buddhism after witnessing the psychic powers of the Buddha. He thus prepared Sri Lanka to receive the Dhamma and eventually become its protector.

Five years later, the Buddha saw that a war between two Naga kings called Culodara and Mahodara was imminent because of their quarrel over a jewelled throne. The Buddha travelled again to the island to mediate in this dispute. Out of respect and devotion for the Buddha, the two kings gave up the throne to a third Naga king called Maniakkhika of Kelaniya.

The Buddha visited for the third time three years later, on the invitation of Maniakkhika and preached the Dhamma in Kelaniya. He then went on to visit the mountain called Sri Pada where he left an imprint of his left foot at its peak. Before returning to India, he stopped by at Dighavapi, Anuradhapura and various other places on the island.

Colonization by Prince Vijaya

On the day of the Buddha's passing into final Nibbana, a young Indian prince called Vijaya arrived in Sri Lanka. The prince had been banished by his father because of his unruly behaviour. Together with seven hundred

of his followers, he came in search of a new home.

Prince Vijaya married a local aboriginal princess named Kuveni and eventually took control of the island. However, after crowning himself king, he sent her away and married a princess from the Pandyan kingdom of South India. Other maidens of high birth also arrived and married the king's followers.

The legend goes on to state that one of the maidens was a relative of the Sakyas, the clan of the Buddha's family. In this way, the lineage and descendants of King Vijaya came to be connected directly with the Buddha himself.

The followers of the king founded other settlements and they ruled an area along its north-western region. King Vijaya passed away without a son after a reign of 38 years, and was succeeded by his nephew, Panduvasudeva.

This lineage continued for more than 200 years, producing a glorious legendary civilization. It culminated in the ascension of King Devanampiya Tissa to the throne, who was to be the first Buddhist convert of the island.

The Pali Chronicles

Sri Lanka has several rich and detailed sources of its early history, known collectively as the Vamsas, and these are traditionally regarded as historically accurate by its people. However, they have a religious bias because they were written by members of the Buddhist Order and also contain some legends and imagery intertwined with historical fact.

There are eight important Vamsas, the main ones being the Dipavamsa, the Mahavamsa and the Culavamsa. Other Vamsas include the Mahabodhivamsa or history of the Bodhi Tree, the Duthavamsa or history of the Tooth Relic, and the Thupavamsa or history of the stupas.

The Dipavamsa

The Dipavamsa, or History of the Island, is considered to be the oldest historical record of Sri Lanka and it is written in Pali. Dating from around

the 3rd to 4th century CE, it is likely to be the work of several bhikkhus and bhikkhunis (Buddhist monks and nuns). It starts with the Buddha's life and his legendary three visits and ends with the reign of King Mahasena in the 4th century CE. It is considered to be the major source for the Mahavamsa.

The Mahavamsa

The Mahavamsa, or Great Chronicle, is perhaps the most important literary work of Sri Lankan origin. Written in Pali around the 5th century CE by the Buddhist monk Mahathera Mahanama, it chronicles the history of the island from the time of the legendary Prince Vijaya until the reign of King Mahasena. This record spans a period from the 6th century BCE to the 4th century CE.

Apart from the early legends, the Mahavamsa has been found to be historically quite accurate and in some instances, remarkably detailed and impartial. Its central theme is the role of the kings as the protectors of Buddhism. The Mahavamsa also contains much information of historical interest such as stories of invasions and battles, the construction of stupas and reservoirs, and also the lives of the court and the common people.

Taken together with a later chronicle, the Culavamsa, the Mahavamsa gives a continuous record of more than 2,000 years of the history of Sri Lanka and can be regarded as the world's longest unbroken historical record.

The Culavamsa

The Culavamsa, or the Lesser Chronicle, continues from where the Mahavamsa leaves off. It was written by several monks after the death of Mahathera Mahanama and is divided into two parts. The first part begins with the arrival of the Tooth Relic of the Buddha in the 4th century CE and concludes with the reign of King Parakramabahu the Great in 1186.

The second part is an attempt by later monks to bring the historical record of the Culavamsa up to fairly recent times. It continues the history of the monarchy until its end in 1815, when the island came under the rule of the British.



The Arrival of Buddhism

King Asoka and the Third Buddhist Council

The Third Buddhist Council was one of the most important events in the history of Buddhism. Its most significant outcome was to bring Theravada Buddhism to Sri Lanka, therefore ensuring its survival after it disappeared from India around the 13th century. This Council was convened around 250 BCE by King Asoka, the greatest ruler of India, and it was held in the city of Pataliputta.

Originally a cruel, violent and highly ambitious ruler, King Asoka converted to Buddhism after a particularly bloody campaign in conquering the state of Kalinga. More than 250,000 people were killed or taken into captivity during this war. Asoka made Buddhism the state religion and spread its teachings throughout the country. These teachings were inscribed on numerous stone slabs and columns and are known as the Rock Edicts and Asokan Pillars, some of which can still be seen today. Among his most notable official policies were the encouragement of “ahimsa” or non-violence, and the promotion of religious harmony.

Because of his generous patronage of Buddhism, some people abused this support by joining the Sangha (the Buddhist Order of monks and nuns) just to enjoy its privileges. The Third Council was thus convened to purify the Sangha and purge the corrupt monks who exploited Asoka's support of Buddhism for their own ends.

Headed by Ven. Moggaliputta Tissa, the Third Council had another vital objective. This was to spread Buddhism beyond India by sending missionary monks to nine different countries. These countries were as diverse and far apart as Greece and Burma but the most important mission was to the island of Sri Lanka.

This mission was led by none other than King Asoka's own son, Ven.

Mahinda, who was to convert the king of Sri Lanka and all of his followers and subjects too.

Pre-Buddhist Sri Lanka

In contrast to Indian civilization and culture, which was one of the most highly developed and sophisticated societies of the ancient world, Sri Lanka was little more than a collection of small and backward rural and fishing villages at the time of Ven. Mahinda's arrival. The legends portray an advanced and glorious civilization existing around the period of 500 BCE but there is little material evidence or other records corroborating this picture.

Archaeological remains suggest the existence of an aboriginal people known as the Balangodas as far back as 30,000 years ago. They were hunter-gatherers and cave-dwellers and were likely the first inhabitants. Indo-Aryan traders and fishermen arrived from India in subsequent waves, settling along the west-central coast and riverine areas.

The island did not have any dominant or organized religions but had beliefs centred around the worship of Yaksas and Yaksinis, or male and female supernatural beings, thought to be inhabiting trees, caves, mountains and other places. This was a form of ancestor worship, as it was believed that tribal chiefs and relatives were reborn as such spirits, who carried on protecting their families after their death.

There was also the worship of animistic deities such as the god of Sri Pada, called Sumana. The veneration of these deities and spirits continue to the present day, with the belief that most of these supernatural beings had 'converted' to Buddhism, justifying their worship by the majority Buddhist population.

Traces of Brahmanism and Jainism have also been found in pre-Buddhist Sri Lanka and these religions were likely brought over by the early settlers from India. It is possible that some forms of Buddhism could also have been brought in by some of these settlers.

In the absence of any significant local religions, Buddhism was thus

able to take root quickly and easily, and establish itself very close to its original state.

Ven. Mahinda and the Conversion of King Devanampiya Tissa

Ven. Mahinda, the son of King Asoka, joined the Sangha when he was 20 years old. He began his mission to Sri Lanka when he was 32, by then already a highly experienced and attained monk. Ven. Mahinda was accompanied by four other monks and a lay disciple.

The ruler of the island when he began his journey was King Mutasiva, who was in old age. Mahinda thus delayed his arrival until King Mutasiva had passed away and Devanampiya Tissa, the king's second son had ascended to the throne in 247 BCE, in the capital city of Anuradhapura.

Devanampiya Tissa, which means 'Tissa, Beloved of the Gods', had already developed a friendship with King Asoka, although they had never met. One of the first things he did once he became king, was to send envoys and gifts to his Indian counterpart. Asoka replied with the message that he had embraced Buddhism and urged Devanampiya Tissa to do the same. The time was then ripe for Mahinda to complete his journey to Sri Lanka and meet the newly crowned king.

In the Chronicles, it is said that the king was out on a hunting expedition with his nobles and soldiers on a full moon day and they were in the hills of Mihintale, a town near Anuradhapura. Mahinda called to the king and addressed him as an inferior. The king, seeing the monks with shaven heads and dressed in yellow robes, was terrified at first, having mistaken them for demons.

However, the dignified and noble demeanour of the monks impressed him and they exchanged greetings and introductions. Mahinda tested the king with several questions and realizing that he was intelligent enough to understand the Dhamma, began to preach the Culahatthipadopama Sutta to him and his retinue. This sutta gave the king a clear idea of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, the holy life of a bhikkhu, and the principle teachings of Buddhism.

At the end of the discourse, King Devanampiya Tissa and his followers embraced their new faith. Buddhism had now arrived in Sri Lanka.

The Sasana Takes Root

The next morning, the king and his family received Mahinda and after a meal, he preached the Petavatthu and Vimanavatthu Suttas to them. These discourses were on suffering spirits and heavenly beings, and how these beings arrived at such states. Mahinda chose to deliver these discourses as he was aware of the existing religious beliefs of the people at that time. The royal family converted to Buddhism after listening to these teachings.

Shortly thereafter, the king donated the Mahamegha royal park in the capital of Anuradhapura, to Mahinda and his companions to use as their residence. The park was later to become the Mahavihara, or great monastery, the centre and stronghold of Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

The king's nephew, minister and dozens of other citizens eventually renounced and became monks. Many women including a queen called Anula, also wanted to join the Sangha. Emissaries were despatched to Asoka in India to help make this possible and Sanghamitta, the sister of Ven. Mahinda was sent to start the Order of nuns.

Sanghamitta brought with her a branch of the sacred Bodhi Tree from India to be planted in Sri Lanka. This was the very tree that gave shelter to the Buddha when he attained enlightenment. The branch was planted in 288 BCE in Sri Maha Bodi, or the Mahabodhi Temple in Anuradhapura which is today, one of the most sacred and popular Buddhist sites in Sri Lanka. When the original Bodhi Tree in the Mahabodhi Temple in India was destroyed, a sapling was taken from the tree in Anuradhapura and replanted in the same spot there.

The legends also mention that the alms bowl, collar-bone and other relics of the Buddha were brought over from India at the same time, and these were subsequently enshrined in various stupas on the island. The collar-bone is housed in the Thuparama Stupa, built by King Devanampiya Tissa,

and the alms bowl is enshrined in the Ruvanvalisaya, or Great Stupa, built in the 1st century BCE by King Dutthagamani.

After receiving these precious treasures from India, Devanampiya Tissa asked Mahinda whether the Sasana, or the presence of the Buddha's teachings, had become established in Sri Lanka. He was told that while the seeds had been planted, it would take root firmly only when a person born of Sinhalese parents had studied the Vinaya in Sri Lanka, and then expounded it in Sri Lanka.

Arittha, one of the king's nephews had already been ordained, and together with the nun Anula, they formed the basis of the new Sinhalese Order of bhikkhus and bhikkhunis. The final condition for Buddhism being firmly established on the island was fulfilled when Ven. Arittha delivered a discourse on the Vinaya in the presence of Devanampiya Tissa, Mahinda and many other monks and nuns.

In his 40 year reign, Devanampiya Tissa helped to establish and spread Buddhism throughout his realm by building numerous monasteries for the Sangha and supporting their activities. Buddhism was to be closely associated with the rulers of Sri Lanka for the next 2,000 years of its history.

Ven. Mahinda, before his passing away at the age of 80, introduced not only the Buddha's teachings but also writing, new forms of art, architecture and literature to Sri Lankan society.

Devanampiya Tissa was succeeded by four of his brothers who continued his policy of supporting and spreading Buddhism in Sri Lanka. However, the island was soon after invaded by adventurers from South India around the 2nd century BCE. These invaders took control of Anuradhapura and the northern provinces.

Two of the invaders ruled for 22 years and the third invader, called Elara, ruled for 45 years. It took one of Sri Lanka's greatest national heroes, King Dutthagamani, to free Sri Lanka from these invaders.



The Ancient Kings : Anuradhapura

The Hero of the Mahavamsa

While most of the north was under the control of the foreign invaders, the principality of Rohana in the south remained free. A young prince called Dutthagamani rallied the people and began a 15 year campaign against the foreign rulers. At the end of the war, Dutthagamani killed King Elara in a duel to the death and finally re-established Sinhalese rule over Anuradhapura and the rest of the island.

Although considered a foreign invader, Elara was known as a just and righteous ruler. After his victory, the newly crowned King Dutthagamani was gracious enough to cremate Elara with full honours and encouraged people to pay respect at his tomb. He proceeded to reconstruct the war ravaged areas and revive Buddhism in Sri Lanka. During his 24 year reign, he built many stupas and monasteries, some of which can still be seen today.

The ruins of the Lohapasada or Brazen Palace, a nine-storey chapter house for monks, is still in existence and was known for its bright bronze-tiled roof. But perhaps the most famous of the king's monuments is the massive Ruvanvalisaya, also known as the Great Stupa. This stupa, standing 300 feet high, is believed to house the begging bowl of the Buddha and is one of the most visited Buddhist attractions in Sri Lanka even today. Dutthagamani passed away in 77 BCE but sadly, he did not live to see the completion of this magnificent stupa.

A significant portion of the Mahavamsa revolves around the exploits of Dutthagamani, and he is thus also known as the 'Hero of the Mahavamsa'. He was succeeded by his brother and later his nephews but Sri Lanka was again invaded by warriors from South India. The island was soon to enter one of the darkest periods in its long history.

Famine and the Writing of the Tipitaka

Vattagamani Abhaya was the fourth son of King Saddhatissa, the brother of Dutthagamani. He came to the throne in 43 BCE after the reign of his three elder brothers. Only five months later, he faced a rebellion from the southern provinces led by a brahmin named Tissa. At the same time, the island was also invaded by Indian raiders from the north.

Both the rebels led by Tissa and the forces of Vattagamani were defeated by the more powerful Indian invaders. While fleeing for his life, a Jain ascetic named Giri, mocked the king from his monastery, calling out “the great black Sinhala is fleeing.” Vattagamani went into hiding, vowing to build a Buddhist temple on the Jain’s monastery should he regain power. From various remote places on the island, he started to gather a large army to challenge the invaders.

In the meantime, the country was ravaged by famine and many were forced to cannibalism to survive. Thousands of people died from starvation and Buddhism went into a severe decline. Monasteries, including the Mahavihara, became deserted as great numbers of monks died or left for India in order to survive.

Buddhism had entered a critical stage and its very survival was threatened. This was because its teachings were passed down orally and this was no longer possible in the chaotic state of the country. Without its teachings, Buddhism would have soon died out. The remaining Theras, or senior bhikkhus, thus made it their utmost priority to preserve the teachings by having them written down on ola, or palm leaves.

The Fourth Buddhist Council was convened with Vattagamani as its patron and for the first time in Sri Lanka’s history, the Tipitaka was committed to writing. This was done together with its Commentaries at the Aluvihara cave temple near the town of Matale. The Tipitaka, or the three baskets of the Buddhist scriptures, are made up of the Vinaya Pitaka or rules for the Sangha, the Sutta Pitaka or the discourses of the Buddha, and the Abhidhamma Pitaka or the higher teachings.

After many more years of strife, Vattagamani attacked Anuradhapura and defeated the invaders. He was to rule the country for the next 12 years until his death in 17 BCE. One of his first actions on regaining the throne was to demolish the monastery of Giri, the Jain ascetic who had mocked him. In its place, he built a Buddhist monastery called the Abhayagiri Vihara, affixing his name with that of the Jain ascetic.

The king presented this new monastery to a monk named Kupikkala Maha Tissa, who had been of great help during his time in exile. Unfortunately, this act of generosity was to lead to a great schism in the Sri Lankan Sangha.

Schisms and Unorthodox Teachings

The monks of the Mahavihara, the original centre of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, felt that it was improper for a bhikkhu to receive such a gift. Therefore, they expelled Kupikkala Maha Tissa for accepting the gift of the Abhayagiri Vihara from Vattagamani. His pupil, Bahalamassu Tissa or “Big-Bearded Tissa”, was unhappy with the treatment meted out to his teacher. He was similarly expelled and left the Mahavihara with 500 monks to join the Abhayagiri Vihara.

While not on good terms, there was no difference in the doctrines of the two monasteries. It was only in later times when monks from the Vajjiputta sect in India came to live at the Abhayagiri, that their views on the Buddha’s teachings, or the Dhamma, began to diverge. This sect held the unorthodox view that everyone has a permanent individual identity or soul, contrary to the central Buddhist teaching of anatta, or insubstantiality. They also took the view that arahants can fall back after being enlightened. The monks of the Abhayagiri approved of these unorthodox teachings and became known as the Dhammaruci sect, named after the teacher of the Vajjiputtakas from India.

While the conservative monks of the Mahavihara studied only the orthodox Theravada texts, the monks of the Abhayagiri studied both the Theravada and Mahayana scriptures. They kept in touch with different Buddhist sects in India and accepted liberal views and progressive ideas, even if these were unorthodox.

The next 300 years were largely uneventful for Buddhism with most of the rulers supporting either one or the other of these two monasteries, and advancing the cause of Buddhism in Sri Lanka in their own ways.

However, a new school of thought appeared during the reign of King Voharika Tissa in 291 CE. This new school called Vetullavada held views even more unorthodox and heretical than the Dhammaruci sect. Unfortunately, the monks of the Abhayagiri adopted these teachings.

An example of Vaitulya doctrine was that the Buddha lives in the Tusita heaven and never came down to earth. Instead, he sent an emanation of himself to earth to teach his attendant Ananda, and it was actually Ananda who preached the Dhamma and not the Buddha. They also maintained that there is no merit in giving alms to the Sangha.

It is possible that the Vaitulyans derived their doctrines from the Mahayana master Nagarjuna, whose teachings had begun to flourish in India around the second half of the second century CE. The bhikkhus of the Mahavihara objected to these doctrines as heretical and contrary to the Buddha's true teachings.

Voharika Tissa suppressed the Vaitulyans and also purged many corrupt members of the Sangha at the same time. The Vaitulyans, nonetheless, began to reassert themselves within a few years and Sri Lanka was to enter another troubled age in its history.

The Destruction of the Mahavihara

When King Gothabhaya came to power in 309 CE, he rebuilt old monasteries, constructed new ones and generously supported the bhikkhus. He also suppressed the resurgent Vaitulyans by exiling 60 of their leaders to India.

These unorthodox monks settled in the Chola region of South India and began planning their return. They made connections with a young and able monk called Sanghamitra who was to lead the resurgence of Mahayana in Sri Lanka. Sanghamitra visited Gothabhaya and greatly impressed him. Eventually he was engaged as the personal

tutor to the king's two young sons. The elder prince, Jettha Tissa, did not like Sangamitra but the younger son, Mahasena, became his loyal and devoted pupil.

When he became king, Jettha Tissa killed many of his father's ministers to consolidate his own power. Sangamitra then fled to India fearing for his life. Jettha Tissa however, died within a year of his coronation and Mahasena assumed the throne in 334 CE. Sangamitra then immediately returned to reunite with his former pupil, the new king of Sri Lanka. The ascendancy of the Mahayana and the destruction of the Mahavihara, the stronghold of orthodox Buddhism, was about to begin.

Taking residence in the Abhayagiri, Sanghamitra made many attempts to convert the monks of the Mahavihara to Mahayana. Failing in these attempts, he then managed to persuade Mahasena to impose penalties on anyone providing food to the bhikkhus of the Mahavihara. Unable to survive, the monks were forced to leave Anuradhapura and they went south to the province of Rohana and other areas.

The Mahavihara was left deserted for nine years although it was still revered and respected by the local people. The Abhayagiri and its Mahayana teachings were unchallenged during this period.

With the approval of Mahasena, Sanghamitra then proceeded to have the Mahavihara demolished. Its structures were torn down and the materials were used to construct new buildings in the Abhayagiri. Even the land of the Mahavihara was ploughed over and used as planting grounds for beans. The people however, greatly resented these actions.

Two persons, a minister who was a good friend of the king, and one of the queens, were to step forward to help rescue the Mahavihara. The minister, Meghavanna Abhaya, raised an army and declared war on Mahasena. The king then came to realize the seriousness of the situation and his mistake in allowing the destruction of the Mahavihara. He promised to restore the great monastery. The queen, one of Mahasena's favourite wives, took matters into her own hands and had Sanghamitra killed.

Mahasena however, proceeded to build another large monastery within the boundaries of the Mahavihara, despite the protests and unhappiness caused by this decision. The new monastery called the Jetavana, was presented to a monk called Tissa Thera who belonged to the Sagaliya sect, another unorthodox Buddhist movement. Tissa Thera was subsequently expelled by the Sangha and disrobed by the king's Minister of Justice. The Jetavana stupa can still be seen today. It is the tallest stupa in Sri Lanka and one of the highest in the world.

During his reign, Mahasena, despite his hostility towards the orthodox Mahavihara, contributed greatly to the welfare of his people in other ways. He was known for building many huge reservoirs and canals which provided abundant water for irrigation in the largely agricultural country. He constructed the Minneriya Reservoir which covers 4,670 acres and has a circumference of 21 miles. This reservoir is one of the marvels of ancient civil engineering and is still in existence today.

The Sacred Tooth Relic

Mahasena's eldest son, Sirimeghavanna, succeeded him in 362 CE. He made amends for his father's deeds and regained the good-will of the Mahavihara through his generous support. It was during his reign that Sri Lanka's greatest religious treasure arrived from India.

In the 4th century CE, the Buddha's left eye tooth came into the possession of King Guhaseeva of Kalinga, who had become a Buddhist. A prince called Dantha from the nearby city of Udeni had also become a Buddhist and visited Kalinga to worship the Tooth. Guhaseeva was pleased with this young prince and allowed him to marry his daughter, Hemamala.

However, the enemies of the king began to raise an army to attack Kalinga and destroy the sacred Tooth. Learning of this, he sent Dantha and Hemamala with the Tooth to Sri Lanka where he knew it would be safe. According to legend, the princess hid the Tooth in her hair to avoid discovery as she travelled.

In the ninth year of his reign, King Sirimeghavanna received the Tooth and had it enshrined in his palace. The Tooth came to be associated with the

Abhayagiri where it was displayed annually, instead of the Mahavihara. This was possibly because Dantha and Hemamala were Mahayana Buddhists and the Abhayagiri was known even in India, as the centre of Mahayana Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

In time the Tooth Relic became the symbol of power for the kings of Sri Lanka and their legitimacy to rule. It was stolen and recaptured more than once and is currently housed in the city of Kandy in the Sri Dalada Maligawa, or the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic.

Healing of the Schism

The unorthodox monks of the Abhayagiri and the Jetavana submitted to the orthodox Mahavihara in the late 6th century but before that happened, there were two noteworthy events.

The first was the visit of the famous Chinese pilgrim and writer, Fa-Hien. This took place around the beginning of the 5th century, during the reign of King Buddhadasa. Mahayana Buddhism was flourishing at that time and Fa-Hien noted that there were 5,000 monks residing in the Abhayagiri. In contrast, the Mahavihara had about 3,000 monks.

A few decades later, the great commentator Buddhaghosa took residence in the Mahavihara where he translated the Sinhalese commentaries on the Tipitaka into Pali. Buddhaghosa was born in South India and became an expert on the Brahmanical teachings and philosophy. He eventually joined the Buddhist Order and wrote many great works and commentaries, one of the most important and influential being the Visuddhimagga, or Path to Purification.

His works likely played a great part in the revival and preservation of Pali as the scriptural language of Theravada Buddhism, and the principle medium of exchange between the monks of the various Theravadin countries.

During the reign of Aggabodhi I in the late 5th century, another great monk, Jotipala, arrived from India. At that time, the Buddhist monks in India undertook studies in logic and practiced debate in addition to their religious training, and this sharpened their skills to a great degree. Jotipala

engaged the Vaitulyan monks from the Abhayagiri and the Jetavana in a public debate and defeated them.

The unorthodox monks accepted their defeat graciously and yielded to the doctrines of the Mahavihara. The Vaitulyan teachings faded away, although the Abhayagiri and the Jetavana monasteries remained active and well supported.

The schism between the great monasteries was finally healed and there was to be no more major differences in Buddhist doctrine from that time. Since then, Theravada Buddhism has become firmly entrenched in Sri Lanka without rivalry.

Unrest, Invasions and Decline

There were intervals of peace during the 500 year period from the reign of King Aggabodhi II who came to the throne in 601, and the ascension of King Vijayabahu I in 1055. However, this period was also marked by civil wars, foreign invasions and a serious decline in Buddhism.

The 7th century saw the island ruined by civil wars between different rulers struggling for power. Rival kings would flee to India after their defeat and then return with foreign mercenaries to continue their fight. Many resorted to looting Buddhist monasteries of their money and treasures to finance their wars, and even the Mahavihara and Abhayagiri were not spared from being plundered.

However, a few kings such as Kassapa II ruled over periods of calm. After becoming king in 641, he repaired and rebuilt many monasteries, sent monks to different parts of the island to preach and also helped compose a compendium of Pali texts. Learned monks were honoured and respected in this period and Hiuen-Tsiang, the famous Buddhist monk and traveller, even acclaimed the Sri Lankan bhikkhus for their wisdom and knowledge.

The late 7th century was also peaceful and saw the emergence of the Pamsukulika monks, who were originally from the Abhayagiri. Due to royal support and their popularity, the life of monks in general had become very luxurious and comfortable. The Pamsukulika monks however, wore

rag robes and lived in forests, and this movement was likely an attempt to return to the original ascetic practices at the time of the Buddha. They were popular and honoured by kings such as Aggabodhi VII in the late 8th century and Kassapa IV in the early 10th century.

In the 9th and 10th centuries, the northern reaches of the island were ravaged by numerous invasions from the Pandya and Chola kings of South India. Anuradhapura as a result, began to lose its stature as the capital city because of its vulnerability and proximity to India. Polonnaruwa, located further south-east, grew in importance because of its more secure location and extensive irrigation works.

In a particularly vicious attack in the late 9th century, the Pandyan king invaded with a large army and sacked Anuradhapura, plundering its palaces, towns and monasteries, taking many valuable Buddha images back to India. King Sena I eventually left the capital to settle in Polonnaruwa.

His successor, King Sena II, managed to raise a Sinhalese army to invade Pandya. He defeated its king and returned with all the looted treasures. The island then enjoyed several decades of peace. Sena II restored old monasteries and the Sasana flourished during his reign.

After the rule of several more kings, Sri Lanka was invaded by the powerful Chola emperor, Rajaraja I in 993. The island was ruled at that time by King Mahinda V who was forced to flee south to Polonnaruwa. Taking advantage of the country's weak state of affairs, Rajendra I, son of Rajaraja I, invaded the island again in 1017. King Mahinda V was captured and taken to India, and the Cholas sacked the city of Anuradhapura again. It was around this time that the Sri Lankan Order of nuns died out.

The subsequent kings of Sri Lanka then based themselves at Polonnaruwa, and the role of Anuradhapura as the capital came to an end. Buddhism suffered greatly through all these wars and foreign occupation, and the Sangha came very close to extinction.

It was only in the next phase of history that the great ruler Vijayabahu I drove out the invaders, and the Sangha was revived with the help of the Burmese.

The Medieval Kings : Polonnaruwa and Kotte

Help from Burma

The period from the 11th to 15th centuries was a time of great religious interaction between the Theravadin Buddhist countries of Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand. Regular exchanges were made with mutual benefit, and each country came to the help of the others when the survival of Buddhism in their respective countries was threatened.

The first such assistance took place in Sri Lanka during the reign of King Vijayabahu I. At that time, the Chola invaders occupied the capital city of Polonnaruwa and controlled the northern regions. However, their influence did not extend to the southern areas centred around the province of Rohana.

After becoming the king of Rohana in 1055, Vijayabahu I made preparations to attack Polonnaruwa. Fifteen years later, he sent 3 armies to surround Polonnaruwa and laid seige to the city for 7 months. With the Chola kingdom facing its own difficulties in India, their forces were isolated and finally driven out of Sri Lanka.

Vijayabahu I became the first Sinhalese king of Polonnaruwa, and the country was reunited after more than a hundred years of war and foreign occupation. He set about mending the country and restoring Buddhism to its former state.

Unfortunately, there were hardly any monks left by that time. In fact, the king could not even get five properly ordained monks together to perform the Upasampada, or the rites of ordination for new monks. Such was the depressed state of Buddhism during that period. Vijayabahu I then sought help from Burma, sending a mission to King Anuruddha who was a great patron of Theravada Buddhism.

The Burmese king reacted favourably, despatching a number of senior and learned monks to Sri Lanka, together with many sacred texts. The Burmese revived the monkhood in Sri Lanka and also proceeded to teach the Pitakas anew. The Sri Lankans in return, gifted many of their own sacred books to the Burmese, which they brought back to their own country. These exchanges further strengthened the Buddhist relationship between the two countries, which lasts till this day.

In fact, King Kyanzittha who succeeded Anuruddha, subsequently instructed the Burmese monks to compare their Tipitaka with the Sri Lankan texts obtained from the Mahavihara. He made it clear that their reference to orthodox Buddhism was to be from Sri Lanka and not from any other Buddhist country. The Burmese Tipitaka thus came to be based on the Sri Lankan texts and in this way, Theravada Buddhism was cemented in Burma.

Vijayabahu I reigned for 55 years and passed away in 1110. Before his death, he completed more great works such as the building and repairing of reservoirs and canals for the people. He also reconciled the Mahavihara, Abhayagiri and Jetavana and restored their monasteries. He constructed a new temple in Polonnaruwa to house the Tooth Relic, and also built roads and resting places for pilgrims journeying to Sri Pada.

When the Burmese Sangha fell into disarray in the 12th century, King Narapatisithu requested the help of Sri Lankan monks to revive and reorganize it in Burma. This was a reflection of the vast prestige of Sinhalese Buddhism at that time. The Sri Lankan Sangha thus returned the earlier favour of the Burmese, by conducting proper ordinations for their monks in 1181 in Pagan.

A Purification of the Sangha

Troubling times were to come following the death of Vijayabahu I. A succession of weak and petty monarchs who were more interested in wealth and squabbling than in their people, ruled the island for the next 50 years. During this time, the Sangha descended into corruption and unorthodox teachings again made a resurgence.

Fortunately, Parakramabahu I brought a period of relative peace after he ascended to the throne in 1153. A reason for his successful reign was his possession of the Tooth Relic and alms bowl of the Buddha, as these had become symbols of a king's legitimacy to rule. After rebuilding Polonnaruwa and restoring much of the previous capital of Anuradhapura, Parakramabahu I turned his attention to reuniting and purifying the Sangha.

By then, the general discipline and practice of the bhikkhus had sunk to a very low level. The monasteries were filled with unscrupulous monks who were not conversant with the Dhamma, and who were creating trouble for themselves and others. Some monks even had families and behaved like lay people, engaging in business and pursuing material gain. Without the leadership of a virtuous and knowledgeable Sangha to set a good example and teach the Dhamma to the laity, Buddhism would soon have become totally corrupt and ineffectual, and eventually die out.

Parakramabahu I together with the learned Mahathera Kasyapa, proceeded to convene a council with the leaders of the three monasteries of the Mahavihara, Abhayagiri and Jetavana. Members of the Sangha were investigated and unworthy monks had to change their ways or leave the Order. In one of the most important events for Buddhism, the three monasteries agreed to accept the orthodox teachings of the Mahavihara, and united themselves as one fraternity.

A code of discipline was drawn up for the Sangha and this was enforced by the king. The code laid down the directions for the proper observance of the Vinaya rules, which was to be observed by all members of the Sangha. Parakramabahu I subsequently engraved this code on the rock surfaces of the stone shrine of what is now known as the Gal Vihara.

Buddhism subsequently enjoyed a significant revival largely because of the unification of the three monasteries. There was much interaction with the Sangha of Burma and Thailand and these two countries became heavily influenced by Sri Lankan Theravada Buddhism. Many noteworthy works in Pali, Sanskrit and Sinhalese were written, translated and compiled by several highly learned Theras during this period.

The Malabars and the Siamese

Buddhism continued to flourish in the reign of Nissankamalla who became king in 1187. A great benefactor of the Sasana, he built numerous monasteries and temples and again purified the Sangha by ordering corrupt monks to be expelled.

His death however, marked the beginning of two decades of invasion and rebellion. The island, weakened by several assassinations, internal strife and raids, became easy prey to a powerful force of Malabars from South India. With an army of 24,000 soldiers, Magha conquered the whole of the island and became king in 1215.

During his rule of 36 years, Magha went all out to destroy Buddhism. He looted monasteries, burned its sacred texts and forced people to give up their faith, sometimes by the use of torture. Fortunately, the Tooth Relic and the Buddha's alms bowl were taken away by several monks and hidden away in the mountains, to prevent them falling into his hands.

These precious treasures were recovered by King Vijayabahu III when he came to the throne in 1232. He ruled from Dambadeniya, a city in the south west where Magha's influence did not reach. A devout Buddhist, he gave refuge to the people and monks who were victims of Magha's oppression. Buddhism flourished in the areas under his control.

Vijayabahu III was succeeded by his son, Parakramabahu II in 1236, who managed to drive the Malabars out. A golden age of the Sasana followed, with many works of Buddhist literature written and great ordination ceremonies held.

This period also marked the beginning of religious exchanges with the Siamese, even though there was still a strong Mahayana presence in Thailand. In particular, King Dhammaraja of Sukhothai in the early 14th century, requested the help of the Sri Lankan Sangha to establish their form of monastic discipline in Thailand. He also asked for their help to reorganize the Siamese Sangha along the lines of the Sinhalese model.

In the 15th century, many Thai monks studied under Sinhalese Mahatheras

who took up residence in Ayutthaya. Chiang Mai, with the help of Sri Lankan monks, became an important centre of Buddhist and Pali studies. The influence of Mahayana Buddhism faded away and Theravada Buddhism from Sri Lanka, known to the Siamese as Lankavamsa, became firmly established in Thailand.

A New Capital and a New Golden Age

With Polonnaruwa becoming increasingly vulnerable to Indian invaders and the proliferation of malaria, the subsequent kings began to shift their capitals further and further south. Places like Yapahuva, Kurunagala and Gampola all took their turns as the capital of the island. In 1412, King Parakramabahu VI established his capital at Kotte along the west coast, located just a few miles south of modern Colombo.

Sri Lanka was to enjoy almost a hundred years of stability, until the coming of the Portuguese in the early 16th century. During this period of peace and prosperity, the Sasana flourished with the support of Parakramabahu VI, who was an ardent and knowledgeable Buddhist.

Great works of prose and poetry were written in Sinhalese, Pali and Sanskrit, and many Buddhist educational and religious institutions were founded. The reputation and fame of Sri Lankan Buddhism spread throughout Burma, Thailand and Cambodia, with people and monks from these countries coming to study and ordain.

Parakramabahu VI, however, was the last Sinhalese king to rule the entire country. Soon after his death, different parts of the island started to break away to form independent kingdoms.

Returning the Favour to Burma

In Burma during the mid 15th century, internal strife and many dissentient schools caused Buddhism to go into decline. Many monasteries did not even have properly ordained monks to perform religious services. In 1476, King Dhammaceti decided to send a group of monks to Sri Lanka, intending to re-establish orthodox Buddhism on their return. Such had the reputation of Sri Lankan Buddhism grown in the preceding decades.

The Burmese monks were to be ordained in Sri Lanka, and then bring back the tradition of the Mahavihara to their country. They were met by King Bhuvanekabahu VI, the ruler of Kotte at the time. They received their higher ordination along the Kalyani River, near Colombo, at the location of the Buddha's second legendary visit to Sri Lanka.

When they returned, the proper ordination of monks in Burma resumed. Dhammaceti also built an ordination hall known as the Kalyani Sima, with some sand brought back from the Kalyani River. In this way, the Sangha in Burma was re-established with the help of Sri Lanka, and were united under the Theravada tradition of the Mahavihara.

Through these exchanges, the Sri Lankan Buddhist texts were taken to Burma, Thailand and Cambodia, and Theravada Buddhism became securely rooted in these countries. The assistance that the island extended to their fellow Buddhist countries had far reaching effects for Buddhism in Sri Lanka. This, in a terrible future when proper ordinations could no longer be carried out, the holy books destroyed, and Buddhism nearly eradicated from the country.



Buddhism and the Portuguese

A Global Empire and Three Small Kingdoms

In complete contrast to the Portuguese Empire which was at the height of its power in the early 16th century, Sri Lanka was a country fragmented into three small rival kingdoms. Taking advantage of their discoveries in navigation, marine technology and firearms, the Portuguese assembled the first global empire in history.

Already in control of parts of Africa, India and South America, the Portuguese arrived in 1505, landing at the port of Colombo. They were looking for opportunities to expand their spice trade to fulfill the huge and growing demand in Europe. The Portuguese also sought to convert to Christianity the people in the territories they conquered. Their motto was 'God, Glory and Gold'.

With the arrival of the Portuguese, Buddhism was to suffer more than four centuries of almost continual oppression by the European colonial powers, coming close to extinction more than once. This pressure was to last until the late 19th century when it made a huge and astonishing revival.

The three kingdoms that the Portuguese encountered were the kingdom of Kotte along the south-west coastline, the Tamil kingdom of Jaffna in the north, and the Kandyan kingdom located in central mountainous region. Ruled by Vira Parakramabahu VIII, Kotte was considered the most important of the three, and the one which the Portuguese first had dealings with.

The Portuguese promised Vira Parakramabahu military aid against his rivals, and also a share of the riches from the spice trade they proposed to establish. In return, he gave them permission to build a trading post in Colombo, which they quickly converted into a fortress. Other Portuguese settlements followed, and the coastal regions soon came under their control.

Sri Lanka's strategic location enabled them to protect their other territories in India and also to control the Indian Ocean. Therefore, they began to look towards extending their power, and a golden opportunity presented itself to them within just a few decades.

The Catholic King of Sri Lanka

By about 1521, the kingdom of Kotte had split into three parts, each ruled by the brothers Bhuvanekabahu, Mayadunne and Madduma Bandara. King Bhuvanekabahu VII ruled in Kotte while Mayadunne was in control of the Sitawaka region. The third brother, Madduma Bandara, died soon after.

Mayadunne, the younger and more capable of the two surviving brothers, began to set his sights on Kotte. Powerless on his own, Bhuvanekabahu sought the help of the Portuguese to defend his kingdom. They exploited these developments to the full and eventually made Bhuvanekabahu their puppet.

Just before his death, the king obtained an agreement from the Portuguese that his grandson, Moha Bandara, was to be his successor. The Portuguese also pledged to protect his kingdom from attack. In return, they were to be given a continuous payment in cinnamon, and permission to enlarge and strengthen their fort in Colombo.

After the death of Bhuvanekabahu, Moha Bandara while still a child, was placed in the care of Portuguese Franciscan monks. Moha Bandara converted to Catholicism in 1557 and took the name Don Juan Dharmapala. Sri Lanka then had its first and only Catholic king.

Don Juan Dharmapala allowed Franciscan monks to preach their Catholic faith, and Christian communities began to be established along the coastal areas. The Portuguese converted many of the local people to Christianity, either by force or by enticement.

A puppet wholly under the control of the Portuguese, Don Juan Dharmapala was made by the Franciscans to sign a deed donating his kingdom to them. After he died in 1597, the Portuguese took formal possession of the kingdom.

No Mercy

The Portuguese exercised no restraint in spreading their religion, and suppressing Buddhism at the same time. Those who took up Christianity were rewarded with power and privileges, while those who did not were punished, often with extreme brutality. The violence and damage inflicted on the Buddhists and their places of worship is unsurpassed in the history of Sri Lanka.

Men were thrown into rivers to be eaten by crocodiles, babies were crushed before their parents' eyes, and mothers were tortured to death. Monasteries were looted and set on fire, and temple lands were given to Catholics to build churches on. People found worshipping the Buddha in public were put to death. Monks were killed on sight and those who remained, fled to the central kingdom of Kandy.

The Portuguese missionaries made no attempt to understand Buddhism, seeing it as nothing more than a creation of the Devil. They believed that only Christianity could save a person from eternal damnation. Therefore, they considered it a duty to their God to destroy Buddhism wherever they encountered it, by sword or fire if necessary.

The Tooth Relic, at Kotte during the reign of Don Juan Dharmapala, was smuggled out to the city of Ratnapura. Being the country's most sacred object and symbol of authority and power, there was great hatred and resentment towards the Portuguese when they claimed to have destroyed it.

The last remnants of Buddhism remained in the Kandyan kingdom which the Portuguese did not control. After various forays, they succeeded in putting a puppet queen on the throne but despite their backing, she was unable to retain power. The Portuguese never managed to subdue Kandy.

During this terrible time, large numbers of the population converted to Christianity and Portuguese influence was so great that even today, many Sinhalese words and family names are derived from Portuguese.

Heads Ploughed Off

Sadly, Buddhism in Sri Lanka was to suffer even more as the 16th century wore on, this time from one of its own kings.

The kingdom of Sitawaka, originally part of Kotte and ruled by Mayadunne, remained independent and a thorn in the Portuguese side. A cunning strategist, Mayadunne won many battles and came close to defeating the Portuguese. He was however, killed by his own son, who took the name King Rajasimha I. The newly crowned king turned his attention to Kandy and conquered it in 1582.

In fear and guilt for slaying his father, Rajasimha sought the advice and help of the Buddhist monks in Kandy to absolve this wrong-doing. He was unable to accept their truthful answer that this was not possible, and that each person must take responsibility for their own actions. In anger and hatred, he turned against Buddhism and became a Saivite, or a follower of Shiva, one of the four main sects of Hinduism.

It is possible that Rajasimha also discovered that some monks were collaborating with his enemies to dislodge him from Kandy. In either case, his revenge was vicious and barbaric, even by the standards of the day. He had the chief monk stoned to death. Other monks were buried neck-deep in the ground and had their heads ploughed off. Monasteries were pulled down and sacred books burned. Temples were given to the Saivites and even Sri Pada, believed to have an imprint of the Buddha's foot, was given over to Hindu control.

Any monks who managed to escape, disrobed and fled. With the persecution of both the Portuguese and Rajasimha, the Sangha was all but wiped out. Buddhism in Sri Lanka had fallen to the darkest days in its history.

Revival of the Sangha and First Contact with the Dutch

King Rajasimha was ousted from Kotte after a battle with Vimala Dharmasuriya I during the last years of the 16th century and died soon

after. Although educated and baptized by the Portuguese, Vimala Dharmasuriya later renounced Christianity and embraced Buddhism. He was responsible for reviving the Kandyan kingdom and the Sangha, which had been decimated in the preceding decades.

After consolidating his power, Vimala Dharmasuriya went on to become a great patron of the Sasana. He restored monasteries, returned control of Sri Pada to the Buddhists, and constructed a new building for the Tooth Relic after supervising its return. More importantly, he sent a mission to Arakan in Burma asking for monks to revive the Sangha. With the help of the Burmese monks, an ordination ceremony was held in 1597 in Getambe, near Kandy, and many youths from noble families entered the Buddhist Order.

Senarat, a cousin of Vimala Dharmasuriya, came to the throne in 1604 and he was also a patron of Buddhism. The Portuguese invaded Kandy several times during his reign and he brought the Tooth Relic away for safe-keeping to Mahiyangana, an ancient city and the first destination of the Buddha's fabled visits to Sri Lanka.

During King Senarat's reign, the Portuguese were attacked by the Dutch many times but they remained in control until 1658. When the Dutch, who were Protestant Christians, finally defeated the Portuguese, it became the turn of the Catholics to be persecuted.



Buddhism and the Dutch

European Rivalry on Sri Lankan Soil

In the mid 16th century, the Dutch were at war with the Spanish and the Portuguese in Europe. They also attacked Portuguese territories in the Far East to gain an overseas empire of their own, and to wrest control of the lucrative spice trade. This conflict between the Dutch and the Portuguese over the colonies was to last until the mid 17th century, and Sri Lanka was one of their battlegrounds.

After Senarat's son ascended to the throne as Rajasinha II in 1635, he won a major victory over the Portuguese, weakening their hold on the island. In 1638, he concluded a treaty with the Dutch to secure their assistance against the Portuguese and in return, he granted them a monopoly of the island's cinnamon trade.

The Portuguese were eventually driven out by the Dutch in 1660. However, they refused to keep their promise to Rajasinha to return his territories, as stipulated in their treaty. Eventually, they controlled all the coastal areas, leaving Kandy a land-locked kingdom.

Cinnamon Comes First

While the Portuguese went all out to destroy Buddhism and convert the local population to Christianity, the Dutch had a different policy. They considered Sri Lanka as a base for their trade in cinnamon, and intended to generate as much revenue as they could from the island. Religion and politics thus took a back seat to their cinnamon business.

However, they did not leave matters of faith entirely untouched. In fact, they actively persecuted the Catholics, seeing them as the remnants of Portuguese power. They even proclaimed that anyone found sheltering or protecting a Catholic priest could be put to death.

In an utmost display of forgiveness and compassion, it was the Buddhists who saved the Catholics from being totally annihilated by the Dutch. Portuguese families were given shelter after being driven out from the coastal areas, and even the Kandyan kings occasionally gave refuge to Catholic priests.

The Dutch however, largely left the Buddhists alone although they did encourage conversions to Protestant Christianity. This persuasion was felt through the schools, the legal system and the civil service. Children were initiated into Christianity in schools, and a person had to be a Christian to own land or to join the government service. The result was that many Sinhalese became nominal Christians. They remained Buddhists at heart and in practice, but baptized for the sake of their careers and personal lives.

Although they discriminated against Buddhists, the Dutch were nowhere as cruel as the Portuguese had been. They were willing to make concessions for the sake of good relations, if this would help in their spice trade. In the 18th century, they even provided ships for a mission to Thailand to bring back monks to restore the Sri Lankan Sangha. With the Dutch focusing on commerce, the Buddhists enjoyed a degree of freedom and were generally able to practice their religion in peace.

Purifications and Failed Missions

Vimala Dharma Suriya II came to the throne of Kandy in 1687 and tried to revive the Sasana which had again fallen into decline. During his peaceful reign of 20 years, he sent a mission to Arakan in Burma to bring back monks to conduct proper ordinations. In one ceremony, 33 novices were ordained and a further 120 men joined the Sangha. This was the second time that Arakan monks conducted ordinations for the Sri Lankans.

Sri Viraparakrama Narendrasinha, the son of Vimala Dharma Suriya, was to be the last king of Sinhalese origin. Crowned in 1706, he was also a devout follower and patron of Buddhism. He passed away without an heir and a relative from South India succeeded him, starting a line of Nayaka kings of Kandy.

Sri Vijaya Rajasinha was a Hindu by birth but converted to Buddhism on ascending the throne in 1739. The Sasana was again in decline and he sent envoys to Burma requesting for monks to yet again resuscitate the Sangha. These missions failed, with almost all the Burmese monks losing their lives on their way to the Sri Lanka by boat.

Discovering that Buddhism was flourishing in Thailand, Sri Vijaya Rajasinha sought the help of the Dutch to send a mission there. They obliged, knowing that their assistance would increase their influence in Kandy and benefit their spice business. A large merchant ship was provided to bring envoys to Thailand, but this too failed due to shipwreck.

A second mission managed to reach the court of King Boromkot who agreed to send Thai bhikkhus to Sri Lanka. Unfortunately, Sri King Vijaya Rajasinha died while the envoys were away. Unsure of the policies of his successor, Boromkot did not allow the Thai monks to proceed to the island. The envoys returned without achieving their objective.

Assisted by the Dutch, Revived by the Siamese

Kirti Sri Rajasingha was crowned in 1751. He adopted Buddhism and became one of its greatest patrons. A genuinely compassionate man, he also called a halt to his predecessor's policy of burning down Catholic churches and repressing their faith.

Due to the failure of the previous missions, the Sangha had gravely degenerated and there were no properly ordained monks left in the country. With few exceptions, monks had abandoned the study of the Dhamma and Vinaya and had instead begun to be engaged in astrology, agriculture and trade. Older monks ordained their close relatives so that the wealth of their temples and monasteries could be kept within their own families.

Determined to correct this sad state of affairs, Kirti Sri Rajasingha, on the advice of his teacher Ven. Velivita Saranankara, requested the Dutch to help send another mission to Thailand. The Dutch obliged and two years into his reign, five envoys began their journey.

After many mishaps, delays and close calls, the mission finally arrived and met King Boromkot. They returned with Ven. Upali Thera and 25 other senior monks. The Sri Lankans who later ordained under the Thai monks came to be known as the Siyam Nikaya, or the Siamese fraternity of monks.

The Sangha at that time was also in danger of being overly influenced by Hindu beliefs and practices. They had started to perform Hindu rituals at the expense of proper Buddhist practices, and this influenced the masses as well. Velivita Saranankara worked against this trend and helped to bring the Sangha back to the authentic teachings and practices.

The Thai monks also helped to reassert the position of Buddhism. They persuaded the king to reorganize an annual event worshipping Hindu gods, to instead celebrate and honour the Tooth Relic. This festival, called the Esala Perahera, is still celebrated in Kandy and is by far the island's biggest annual event.

During Kirti Sri Rajasingha's reign of 35 years, Buddhism although still under colonial rule, enjoyed a period of stability and growth. He was succeeded by his brother Sri Rajadhi Rajasinha in 1796, also a scholar and patron of the Sasana. These two monarchs distinguished themselves by restoring and rebuilding numerous ruined and abandoned temples and shrines in Kandy and the coastal areas. Dutch rule came to an end in 1796 with the coastal areas of the island passing into British control.

Velivita Saranankara

Velivita Saranankara was born in 1698 in the village of Velivita near Kandy, and was to have an immeasurable effect on Sri Lankan Buddhism. He became a monk at the age of 16, when the Sasana was at one of its lowest ebbs and the Sangha almost entirely corrupt. Rejecting the rampant materialism of his contemporaries, he returned to the austere practices and proper behaviour of a Buddhist monk.

Going from place to place, living in caves and sustained only by alms, he gradually attracted the attention of several other monks who wanted to

follow him in the right way of practice. They formed themselves into a small fraternity that came to be known as the Silvat Samagama, or Brotherhood of the Pious. And because he always begged for his food, he came to be known as Pindapata Saranankara.

He became the advisor to King Sri Vijaya Rajasingha and together they did their best to revive the Sangha by bringing in properly ordained monks from Burma and Thailand. The king however, passed away without successfully achieving this task. Saranankara remained as the teacher to his successor, Kirti Sri Rajasingha, and urged him to send another mission to Thailand.

Together with Ven. Upali Thera, the leader of the Thai monks, Saranankara founded the Siyam Nikaya. When he was appointed the head monk of Sri Lanka, he wrote the phrase "Oh monk! Be not proud!" on the door to his room as a personal reminder.

Due primarily to his efforts, the corruption of the Sangha diminished and proper monastic practices were restored. Saranankara wrote several Buddhist works and poems and passed away in 1778 CE at the age of 81. He is remembered as one of the most important figures in the Buddhist history of Sri Lanka.



Buddhism and the British

Between the Dutch, the French and the British

In the last decades of the 18th century, the French began to threaten the British Empire's dominance over the Indian sub-continent. Because of Sri Lanka's strategic location as a base to defend its Indian colonies, the British made plans to take control of the island from the Dutch.

After some skirmishes, the Dutch eventually surrendered Sri Lanka to the British in 1796. Dutch rule had come to an end after just over a hundred years of domination. The island then found itself in the hands of a far more powerful colonial force than either the Portuguese or the Dutch.

The End of Kings

At the time of the Dutch surrender to the British, Kandy was still an independent kingdom. It was ruled by Sri Rajadhi Rajasinha who was a supporter of the Sasana. After his death in 1798, the powerful Adigar or First Minister, planned to have one of the king's young relatives, Sri Wickrama Rajasinha to succeed him. The Adigar, Pilima Talawe, intended to take power for himself later.

Unlike his predecessors, King Sri Wickrama Rajasinha had little interest in Buddhist affairs, and preoccupied himself with palace intrigue and political scheming to hold on to the throne. Pilima Talawe was executed after a rebellion and his nephew Ehelepola became the new Adigar. Because of Sri Wickrama Rajasinha's tyranny and brutality towards the people, he became very unpopular.

He used extremely cruel means of punishment and torture, and his favourite method of execution was having people trampled to death by elephants. The Sasana did not receive any support and he also seized the property and valuables of the Sangha for his own use.

Ehelepola defected to the British when he was discovered to be plotting against the king. In revenge, he had the Adigar's children and wife publicly put to death by some excruciatingly cruel means. Although the British had already launched several failed campaigns to annex Kandy, Ehelepola persuaded the British to try again.

This time they met no resistance due to the people's hatred of the king. His capture in 1815 marked the end of the kingdom of Kandy, and completed the British subjugation of the Sri Lanka. They were to rule for the next 133 years until its independence in 1948.

Sri Wickrama Rajasinha was exiled to India, fortunate to escape a hideous death by his own people and he died in 1852. His passing brought a sad end to the proud line of mostly devout Buddhist kings of Sri Lanka, which had begun more than 2,000 years ago with King Devanampiya Tissa in 247 BCE.

A Benevolent Beginning

The British formally took control of Kandy in a solemn assembly in March 1815, marked by the signing of a treaty called the Kandyan Convention. At this ceremony, which was also attended by senior Kandyan monks, the chiefs of Kandy signed over control of their country to the British.

According to the terms of this convention, the chiefs were to retain their traditional privileges and Kandy was to be placed under the administration of a British Resident, who in effect took the place of the king. It was also agreed that the kingdom would be governed according to its customary laws and that Buddhism, including its practice, institutions and ceremonies, would be protected.

There was mutual respect between the British Resident and the Buddhists in the early years following the signing of the Kandyan Convention. The Buddhists treated the Resident as if he was the king, and he took custody of the Tooth Relic and participated in its annual rituals. He also appointed the chief monks when this was necessary.

By this time, British Christian missionaries had already arrived in the

coastal areas. The Baptists started their activities as early as 1792, the Wesleyan Methodists followed in 1814, the Americans in 1816, and the Church of England in 1818. They soon began to exert pressure on the British authorities' benign policy towards Buddhism.

The missionaries started a campaign and eventually forced the British Resident to cease participating in the annual Tooth Relic ceremonies, and to withdraw all support for Buddhism. In 1848, the custody of the Tooth Relic and the administration of its temple were handed over to a committee of Buddhist monks. Any remaining links the authorities had with Buddhist institutions were gradually severed.

Unfair Advantages

Prior to the arrival of the British, the Dutch had a policy of active persecution of Catholics. This policy was abolished in 1806 by the British authorities. In 1829, they passed an act proclaiming the freedom of worship for all Christian denominations.

This resulted in an explosion of Christian evangelical activity which was supported and encouraged by the British authorities. Missionary schools and convents were established in many places and these were financed by public funds. With government support, these schools were able to provide education for jobs in the civil service and thus, many Buddhist parents sent their children to these mission schools.

Although it was not necessary to be a Christian to gain admittance, students were obliged to learn and take part in Christian religious services. Almost every school had its own church, and students were discouraged from practicing Buddhism.

In fact, most schools had an active policy of disparaging Buddhism, criticizing its teachings and ridiculing its practices. Buddhism was portrayed as "idolatry" and the religion of uneducated and backward people. Because it was perceived to be superior and sophisticated, it inevitably became fashionable to adopt Christianity and take Christian names.

The British authorities hindered Buddhists in other ways too. Children had

to be baptized to be registered, unbaptized couples could not solemnize their marriages, and government jobs were reserved only for Christians.

Missionaries also travelled freely from village to village, denouncing Buddhism and extolling the superiority of Christianity. Thus, many people converted for the sake of their families, marriages and careers, usually without any understanding of the Christian faith.

Buddhism, due to official British government policy and the activities of Christian missionaries, was being seriously disadvantaged and marginalized in its own island stronghold. Christianity, on the other hand, was very much in the ascendancy and growing stronger by the day.

Sharply Differing Attitudes

On first encountering British Christian missionaries, Sri Lankan Buddhist monks treated them with friendliness and respect. They did not see the missionaries as enemies or threats, but as fellow religious teachers and spiritual seekers. They even welcomed the missionaries to preach in their temples and assisted in building their churches.

Christianity was initially seen as a good religion, although with errors when compared to the perfection of the Buddhist teachings. When the missionaries sought to translate the Bible to Sinhalese, two of the island's ablest monks happily gave their assistance.

The monks were therefore surprised when their friendliness and helpfulness was not reciprocated. They were genuinely puzzled when they were refused permission to preach in the churches, with their teachings derided as sinful and blasphemous. This contrasted sharply with the warm reception they gave to the Christians in their temples.

The Buddhists were sincere in their welcome and willingness to learn new teachings that could help their own spiritual progress, as well as that of their people. The missionaries however, came with the intention of destroying Buddhism and converting the island to Christianity.



The Buddhist-Christian Debates

An Inaccurate Prediction

With the authorities' increasingly unfriendly attitude towards Buddhism, and the missionaries' aggressive and incessant attacks on their religion, the monks eventually started to defend their faith against the Christians.

Their response however, was disorganized and ineffectual and limited to their sermons on holy days. The Buddhist community also petitioned the government to stop or moderate these attacks, but to no avail.

The view of the authorities was that Buddhism was doomed in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, well-known figures such as the Sinhalese Christian scholar, James D'Alwis, and the Methodist missionary, Spence Hardy, confidently predicted that it would soon be replaced by Christianity.

The missionaries had acquired a printing press around 1820 which they used to churn out pamphlets and tracts denigrating Buddhism and promoting their own religion. Many of these publications were written by the Methodist minister and scholar, Rev. Daniel Gogerly, who was also an expert in the Pali language. The missionaries even distributed their materials at Buddhist events and started to challenge the monks to public debates.

The Buddhists finally bought a press of their own in 1855 and a second one was acquired in 1862, financed by King Mongkut of Thailand. Ven. Mohottiwatte Gunananda, a forceful and articulate monk from Colombo, and the more renowned Ven. Hikkaduve Sumangala in Galle, wrote most of the Buddhist tracts and pamphlets.

The monks at first ignored the missionaries' challenges to debate. This was a disappointment to the Christians as they hoped to humiliate the monks in public, and thus hasten the downfall of Buddhism. However, the monks

eventually accepted these challenges, to the glee of the Christians.

Three debates were held, in 1865, 1871 and 1873 and were formal affairs with ground rules established before-hand, and proper exchanges between the parties. They culminated in the last and most famous one known as the Panadura Debate. The Buddhists were led by Ven. Mohottiwatte Gunananda and Ven. Hikkaduve Sumangala. The Christians were represented by Rev. David de Silva, the Sinhalese protégé of Rev. Daniel Gogerly, and Rev. F.S. Sirimanne, a catechist of the Church Missionary Society.

The local population took great interest in the final debate which lasted for two days. It had very much of a festive atmosphere with the crowd swelling to more than 10,000 people by the second day. The final debate, one of the most important events in Sri Lankan Buddhist history, was covered by the Sinhalese and English language newspapers.

The proceedings were also published in book form by an American scholar, Dr. J. M. Peebles, who was present at the debate, and who ended up very impressed by the performance of the monks. Another American, Colonel Henry Steele Olcott, chanced upon a copy of this book in America, the result of which was to have far-reaching effects for the future of Buddhism in Sri Lanka and beyond.

The Lion's Roar

Ven. Mohottiwatte Gunananda and Rev. David de Silva, the two main protagonists in the Panadura Debate, had very contrasting styles and characters. Already a seasoned debater, Gunananda was able to play to the audience, standing up and dramatically gesticulating as he spoke. He also addressed the audience in everyday Sinhalese, whereas de Silva used many Pali and Sanskrit quotes which they could not understand easily. Having received a Christian education, Gunananda also knew the Bible very well.

On his own, Gunananda was more than a match for the Christian debaters in terms of oratorical skills. It was his Lion's Roar which dispelled the fear and shame imposed on the Buddhists by the missionaries' continual disparagement of their religion, and it reawakened the country's pride in its religion.

After much arguments and counter-arguments, the turning point of the debate was when Ven. Gunananda pointed to the verse at Judges 1:19 in the Bible. The verse states : “And the LORD was with Judah, and he drove out the inhabitants of the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron.”

Gunananda said that this showed clearly that the God could not be omnipotent as claimed, if he could not even overcome iron chariots. Rev. de Silva tried to explain that the reason the God did not overcome the chariots was because Judah did not have enough faith in him. However, Gunananda countered by asking, if Judah did not have enough faith, then why was the God with him in the first place?

Sri Lankans believe that evil spirits are afraid of iron. In fact, they commonly hang a piece of iron up on their homes to keep evil spirits at bay. Gunananda's point thus made sense to the audience because of this.

Although there were more arguments, the debate was effectively over by the first day. The victory for the Buddhists could not have been more resounding and emphatic, with the crowd shouting and cheering for Gunananda and the other monks. The Lion had Roared.

Word of the triumph spread rapidly throughout the island with temples, villages and towns breaking out in open and joyous celebration. Reflecting the open and tolerant nature of the people, the festivities were free from hostility and anger towards the defeated party, even though they were boisterous and happy.

Pride had returned to Buddhism and its revival in Sri Lanka had begun.

Mohottiwatte Gunananda

Mohottiwatte Gunananda was born in 1823 in the village of Mohottiwatta to a prosperous Buddhist family. Monks in Sri Lanka, after ordination, commonly affix the name of their village to their own name. Gunananda had been in close contact with a Catholic priest in his youth and received his education in Christian schools. He had at one time, even considered becoming a Christian priest.

However, he changed his mind after associating with some monks from his village and ordained at the age of 20, becoming a member of the Amarapura fraternity. His oratorical skills soon became apparent and he started to also acquire great proficiency in the Buddhist teachings.

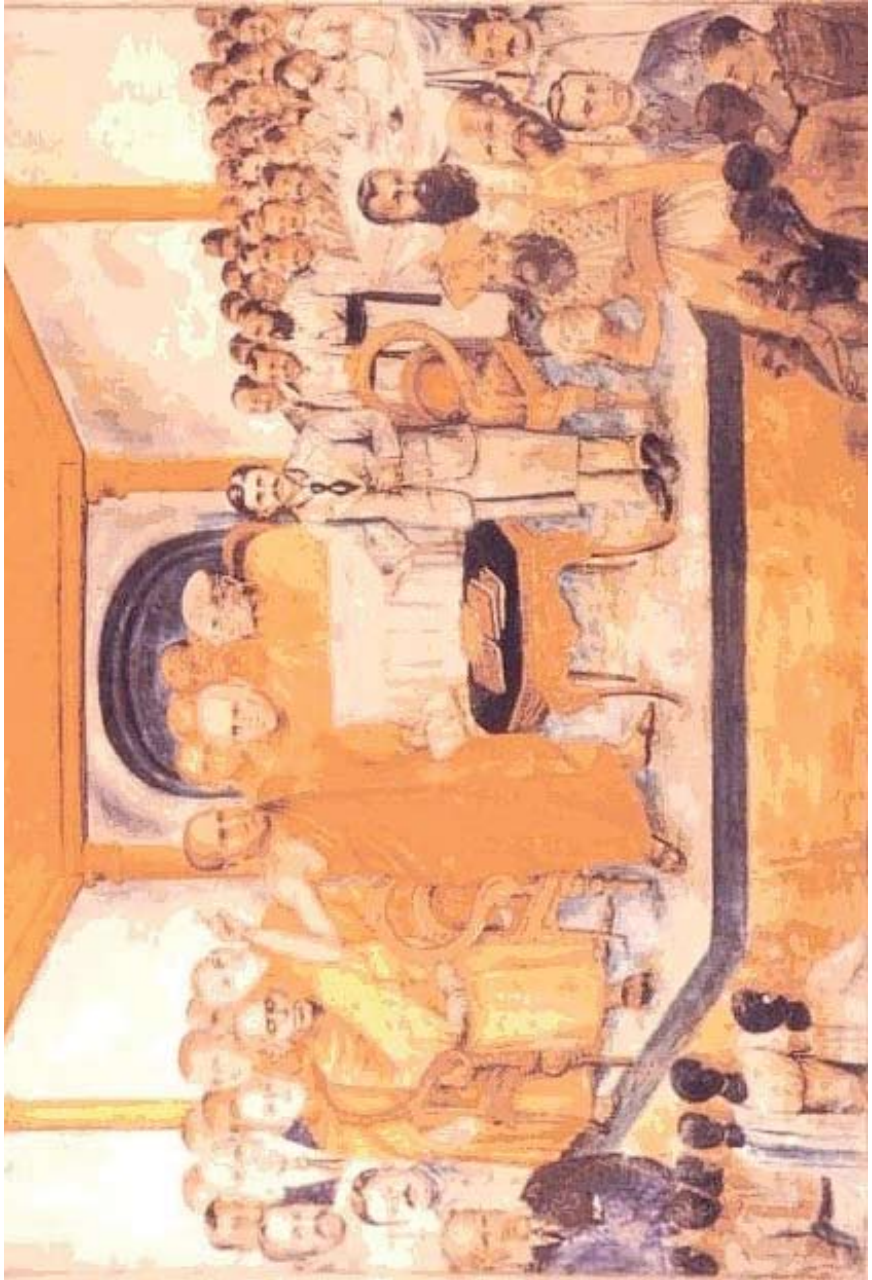
After learning that Buddhists in Colombo were being subject to pressure from the missionaries and discrimination by the government, he moved there and began defending Buddhism with his publications and speeches. In 1862, he formed the 'Society for the Propagation of Buddhism' to organize resistance against the missionaries' attacks, and to publish tracts and pamphlets to counter the anti-Buddhist materials distributed by the Christians.



Ven. Mohottiwatte Gunananda

Gunananda then led the Buddhists in the momentous series of debates with the Christians, which culminated in the famous Panadura Debate of 1873. His outstanding performance and convincing victory sparked off the island-wide revival of Buddhism, and he was hailed a national hero.

Before his death at the age of 67 in 1890, Gunananda continued his efforts in helping to revitalize the Sasana. He published many works and also served on the committee that designed the Buddhist flag.



The Panadura Debate



The Buddhist Revival

In from the West

The result of the Panadura Debate set off a chain of events that helped to change the entire landscape of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. After reading a book about the debate in America, Colonel Henry Steele Olcott decided to travel to the island to seek more knowledge about Buddhism.

Prior to his visit, he corresponded with Ven. Gunananda and Ven. Sumangala and eventually arrived in 1880. As one of the first few westerners professing an interest in Buddhism, he was received with much fanfare and celebration when he arrived in Galle.

Although the Buddhists had regained their self-belief and courage, there was still much more to be done. They still faced the government's discrimination, and the missionaries' dominance over the schools and education system. They lacked organizational skills and a unified leadership, both of which the Sangha at that time was unable to provide.

Olcott with his experience as a senior officer in both the American army and navy, had these necessary organizational skills. Furthermore, as a neutral outsider, he was able to unite the Sangha behind him. Just one month after his arrival, he formed the Buddhist Theosophical Society, bringing together prominent monks and lay people. The objective of the Society was to promote the welfare of Buddhists and to establish Buddhist schools.

Great emphasis was placed on the schooling of children, as Olcott believed that a good education was the only way that Buddhists could stand up to the missionaries. Before the Society was founded, there were only three Buddhist schools. By 1897, the Society had established 46 Buddhist schools and by 1903, they were managing 174 such schools. By 1940, the Society had established 429 Buddhist schools throughout Sri Lanka.

Olcott was also the inspiration for the Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) and Buddhist Sunday schools. These were modelled after the Protestant system, and are still very active today.

In the early days, Olcott worked very hard, going from village to village to raise funds for the schools. His companion and translator was a young man called Anagarika Dharmapala, who was also to play a leading role in the Buddhist revival.

Many of the well-known Buddhist schools such as Ananda College and Nalanda College in Colombo, Dharmaraja College in Kandy and Mahinda College in Galle, stem directly from his efforts. Olcott also encouraged Buddhists to start their own publications to disseminate their teachings. The Buddhist Theosophical Society eventually established both a Sinhalese as well as an English language newspaper.

Olcott was surprised at the lack of proper knowledge about Buddhism amongst most of the laity he encountered. He therefore formulated the Buddhist Catechism in 1881, modelling it after the Christian Catechism. The Buddhist Catechism summarized the essential teachings in a question and answer format, so that ordinary people were able to learn and understand these teachings on their own. It is still in use today in many schools.

At that time, Vesak Day was surprisingly, not recognized as a national holiday. It was made a holiday only in 1885 after Olcott successfully petitioned the British government in London to grant this right to the Buddhists. He also helped to design a flag which was accepted at the World Buddhist Congress of 1952, as the International Buddhist Flag.

A number of other westerners living in Sri Lanka also played active and significant roles in the service of Buddhism. They translated the ancient texts, wrote books and treatises and eventually taught it in their own countries when they returned home. Among these figures are George Turner who was the first to translate the Mahavamsa to English, Wilhelm Geiger who translated it to German, and Robert C. Childers who published a Dictionary of the Pali Language.

One of the most important figures was Prof. T.W. Rhys Davids who founded

the Pali Text Society in 1881. Together with his wife, Mrs. C.A.F. Rhys Davids, they made a great contribution to the spread and advancement of Buddhist knowledge with their vast number of translations and writings.

Colonel Henry Steele Olcott

Henry Steele Olcott was born in 1832, in New Jersey, U.S.A., into a pious Presbyterian household. He attended the prestigious Columbia University of New York but had to leave after the failure of his father's business.



Colonel Henry Steele Olcott

He then joined the US Army and served during the Civil War. He was promoted to the rank of Colonel after distinguishing himself, and was then transferred to the Naval Department in Washington D.C. Olcott earned himself a good reputation and worked on a special commission investigating President Lincoln's assassination. He subsequently turned to journalism and law.

In 1874, he became involved in spiritualism after befriending the Russian occultist Helena Blavatsky. A year later, they founded the Theosophical Society with a group of other spiritualists. The headquarters of the Society was eventually moved to India so that they could be closer to the teachings of Hinduism, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism.

Olcott and Blavatsky's main interest however, was in Buddhism and they soon made their way to Sri Lanka, arriving in 1880. Just a few weeks after their arrival and convinced of the teachings of the Buddha, they took the Three Refuges and the Five Precepts, thus becoming the first westerners in modern times to publicly and formally become Buddhists. Olcott proceeded to work tirelessly for Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

He passed away in 1907 and the anniversary of his death is still widely observed in Sri Lanka. The service rendered by Col. Olcott to Buddhism

cannot be over-emphasised and the debt that all Buddhists owe to him is impossible to be measured.

Protestant Buddhism

In the late 19th century, Buddhism was taken forward in its revival by Anagarika Dharmapala, Sri Lanka's greatest Buddhist activist. It was to evolve into Protestant Buddhism, a term penned by the eminent Sinhalese scholar and writer, Gananath Obeyesekere.

Protestant Buddhism had two aspects. Firstly, it was a protest against aggressive missionary activities and government policies favouring Christians. Secondly, it referred to the adoption of ideals which had similarities with those of Christian Protestantism.

At that time, many upper-class Sinhalese still considered it unfashionable to be Buddhist. Many of them had converted to Christianity and adopted western names, dressing and customs. Anagarika Dharmapala spoke out against this trend in his numerous speeches and articles, and his activities helped to revive the people's pride in their own religion, language and traditions.

Protestant Buddhism also denied the wrong view prevailing at the time that salvation, i.e. Nibbana, can only be attained through the Sangha. Instead, it maintained that all Buddhists should strive for themselves through proper Buddhist practices, such as meditation. Protestant Buddhism led to a great renewal of interest in this essential and indispensable practice.

In addition, it gave rise to a growing sense of nationalism and Buddhist religiosity. Another result was the increased involvement of the laity in the propagation of Buddhism, and the organization and administration of Buddhist institutions.

Anagarika Dharmapala

Anagarika Dharmapala was born Don David Hewavitarana in Colombo in 1864. His father was a wealthy merchant who was a key member of the Buddhist Theosophical Society founded by Col. Olcott. Although largely



Anagarika Dharmapala

educated in English Christian schools, Don David followed the speeches and debates of Ven. Mohottiwatte Gunananda and Ven. Hikkaduve Sumangala and associated closely with them.

Don David left home at the age of 20 to lead a celibate life and devote all his time and energy to the support and promotion of Buddhism. He soon changed his name to Anagarika Dharmapala. "Anagarika" means a homeless one who keeps the Eight Precepts, and "Dharmapala" means a protector of the Dhamma.

After joining the Buddhist Theosophical Society, Dharmapala travelled together with Olcott in his campaign to establish Buddhist schools, and acted as his interpreter and assistant. He soon became the major force in the Buddhist revival through his powerful speeches and articles.

Anagarika Dharmapala also established hospitals, schools and other foundations for the spread of Buddhism and for the benefit of the sick and needy. Notably, he helped to form the Young Men's Buddhist Association in 1898 together with a group of like-minded lay people. The YMBA is now also established in many countries outside of Sri Lanka.

Apart from his contributions to Buddhism in the country of his birth, Dharmapala founded the Mahabodhi Society in India. Many important Buddhist shrines in India had fallen into ruin and the Mahabodhi Temple, the very place where the Buddha had become enlightened, had been converted into a Hindu shrine. One of the Mahabodhi Society's aims was to restore these shrines and to re-establish Buddhist control of the Mahabodhi Temple. Dharmapala also travelled to Europe and America, giving lectures and creating international awareness in Buddhism.

He ordained as a bhikkhu in Sarnath, India in 1933 and passed away in

the same year at the age of 78. Dharmapala left behind an incomparable legacy in the service of Buddhism.

The Buddha Jayanti

Sri Lanka attained independence from the British in 1948 to widespread jubilation, enjoying the taste of freedom after more than 450 years of foreign domination. The excitement in anticipation of the Buddha Jayanti celebrations in 1956 also contributed to the euphoric atmosphere.

Celebrated on the Vesak full moon day of the 23rd of May 1956, the Buddha Jayanti marked the 2,500th anniversary of the Buddha's Parinibbana, a day which is significant to Buddhists the world over.

It had been prophesied that the Buddha's teachings would last for 5,000 years and therefore the 2,500th anniversary was of major importance. This is because it was also prophesied that this halfway point would be the beginning of a golden age of Buddhism, with the Dhamma spreading all over the world.

Preparations for this event were made throughout the island, with the government directly involved in many new projects which were to commemorate the occasion. Such projects included the renovation of the Temple of the Tooth, the restoration of various stupas and the building of new Buddhist structures. Other projects were also started, such as the translation of the entire Tipitaka to English and Sinhalese, and the creation of a new and comprehensive Buddhist Encyclopaedia.

In anticipation of the celebrations in 1956, Sri Lankan Buddhists successfully established the World Fellowship of Buddhists in 1950 and also arranged for a conference. This conference was attended by Buddhists from all over the world, and had the stated aim for Buddhists to unite and to work together for the Dhamma and for peace. This was probably the first time that the leaders of all the Buddhist lands, and from every sect and school had ever met together in a single occasion.

All these events helped to reawaken the missionary zeal in Sri Lanka, and its monks went all over the world to spread the Dhamma.



Up To The Present

Social Awakenings

Inspired by the work and efforts of Col. Olcott and Anagarika Dharmapala, a greater sense of social awareness began to awaken in both the laity and monks. The YMBA started a relief fund in aid of flood victims and victims of other natural disasters. They also helped to build shrine rooms in mental hospitals and leper colonies.

The All Ceylon Buddhist Congress, an offshoot of the YMBA founded in 1918, formed a council to operate creches, orphanages, homes for the aged and other similar institutions. One of the objectives of this council was to provide these services to Buddhists who did not want to be pressured into converting to other religions, should they need to use the facilities run by the people of other faiths.

The largest and most prominent social services agency by far is the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement. It originated in 1958 from a series of work camps organized by the teachers and students of Nalanda College.

The Sarvodaya Movement grew rapidly, with several hundred more such work camps organized which involved more than 300,000 volunteers. It is now the largest non-government organization in Sri Lanka and has helped to improve the infrastructure and social needs of around 15,000 villages. Both the laity and monks participate, as well as the followers of other religions.

Its founder A. T. Ariyaratne, a layman, acknowledged the Buddha's teachings in the formation and philosophy of Sarvodaya, and blends mass meditation events with its social activities. Sarvodaya means 'Awakening of All' and is held out as a modern Buddhist example of its evolution and development.

Meditation For All

From a Buddhist perspective, the most important development in recent times was the resurgence of the laity's interest in meditation. Although meditation is an indispensable part of its practice, the perception prior to the Buddhist revival was that it is only for the monks. This view changed as a result of Protestant Buddhism.

A number of lay practitioners travelled to Burma in the early 1950's and witnessed the popularity of meditation among the people there. Realizing the importance and benefits of meditation for Buddhist practice and everyday life, this group formed the Lanka Insight Meditation Society.

With the backing of the Sri Lankan Prime Minister, they requested Mahasi Sayadaw, perhaps the greatest Buddhist meditation master of recent times, to send teachers to start meditation courses based on his method of Vipassana (or Insight) Meditation. Mahasi Sayadaw's method focuses on the movement of the abdomen during the process of breathing, while in the traditional sitting posture. It also encompasses practice in the other postures such as walking, standing and lying down, as well as in all daily activities, as originally taught by the Buddha.

A meditation centre called Kanduboda was subsequently established in 1956 to become the centre for Vipassana meditation in Sri Lanka. It was headed by Ven. Kahatapitiya Sumathipala who was both an accomplished meditator and a good administrator. Kanduboda soon blossomed into an internationally renowned centre, offering excellent facilities for lay meditators and the Sangha too.

The effectiveness and benefits of Mahasi Sayadaw's Vipassana meditation techniques were clearly felt by the laity, and interest has grown rapidly in modern times. Kanduboda has expanded and spawned branches throughout Sri Lanka, and enjoys strong support from the laity and monks.

Institutions of Learning

Two monastic colleges, or pirivenas, established in Colombo in the late

19th century were instrumental in the success of the Buddhist Revival. Vidyodaya Pirivena was established by Hikkaduve Sumangala in 1874, and Vidyalandara Pirivena was founded by Ven. Ratmalane Dhammaloka in 1875.

Many monks and lay people were educated in these centres and several went on to start other monastic colleges in different parts of the island. The numerous books, articles and translations produced at these centres contributed to the revival. Many scholars and monks from other countries also came to learn at these colleges.

Vidyodaya Pirivena was transformed into a university in 1959 and had Ven. Walpola Rahula as one of its most distinguished Vice-Chancellors in the 1960's. It was renamed the Jayawardanapura University in 1978 and continues to be a centre of learning for monks. Vidyalandara Pirivena was also made into a university in 1959 and is now known as the University of Kelaniya.

Several monasteries also came to be centres of Buddhist studies. These are, among others, the Vajiraramaya, Sri Lanka Vidyalyaya, Paramadhamma Catiya, all in Colombo, and the Island Hermitage in southern Sri Lanka. They attracted many westerners, a number who were to become internationally renowned teachers and writers. Among them are Ven. Nanavira Nanamoli from England, and Ven. Nyanatiloka Mahathera and Ven. Nyanaponika Thera from Germany.

One of the greatest Sri Lankan monks in recent times, Ven. Narada Mahathera, was from Vajiraramaya. Narada not only travelled the world spreading the Dhamma from the 1930's to the 1960's, he also authored many books, some of which are still the standard texts for Buddhist learning institutions today.

A relatively new development was the opening of the Buddhist and Pali University of Sri Lanka in 1982, founded by Ven. Walpola Rahula. Providing Buddhist education programmes for the monks and laity, it recently moved to a large and modern campus on the outskirts of Colombo. Its objectives include the propagation of Buddhism, the promotion of Buddhist and Pali studies in Sri Lanka and abroad, and the provision of research facilities for

the various fields of Buddhist studies.

The Buddhist and Pali University also has overseas affiliates, including one in Singapore, where it conducts external tertiary courses from Diploma level up to the level of Master of Arts. Its degrees are internationally recognized and it is also a member of the Association of Commonwealth Universities.

The Monastic Fraternities

Monks in Sri Lanka, with very few exceptions, belong to one of the three Nikayas, or fraternities, that were established at different times in the past.

The Siyam (or Siam) Nikaya is the oldest and the largest of the three Nikayas and is centred around the city of Kandy. It originated in the 18th century when the Sangha was on the verge of extinction. King Kirti Sri Rajasingha and Ven. Velivita Saranankara requested the help of King Boromkot of Thailand to help revive it.

The mission was successful and the Siyam Nikaya, named in recognition of the help from the Siamese, was founded by Ven. Upali Thera together with Ven. Saranankara in 1753. It has two main chapters, the Malwatta and Asgiriya, each of which have their own Maha Nayakas or chief monks.

The Amarapura Nikaya is the second of the three fraternities, and is named after the Burmese city of Amarapura. This Nikaya was formed because the Siyam Nikaya adopted a policy of restricting higher ordination to the upper castes.

A group of wealthy laymen then financed a mission to Burma in 1799, led by Ven. Ambagahapitiye Gnanavimala Thera, to obtain higher ordination for novice monks of the other castes. They travelled to Amarapura, which was the capital of Burma at that time. The mission returned successfully in 1803 to form the Amarapura Nikaya.

This was a significant development as it became the first time that the laity had helped to create a new monastic lineage. The formation of the Amarapura Nikaya was also very important as the monks from this fraternity

played the dominant role in resisting the challenge of the Christian missionaries in the later decades.

Interestingly, while these two Sri Lankan Nikayas name themselves after the Siamese and the Burmese, both the Burmese and Thai monastic Orders consider themselves to have originally descended from Sri Lankan Theravada Buddhism. In fact, they sometimes refer to themselves as the Lankavamsa, or the Sinhala Sangha.

This was due to the long history of religious exchanges and the island's reputation as the stronghold of Theravada Buddhism. For example, Sri Lankan monks helped to reorganize the Sangha in Thailand in the 14th century, and taught Theravada Buddhism to Thai monks in the 15th century. Also, the Burmese Sangha was revived by Sri Lankan monks in the 12th and 15th centuries.

The third fraternity, known as the Ramanna Nikaya, was founded in 1864 by Ven. Ambagahawatte Saranankara after he had gone to Burma to be ordained. It has the strictest practices of the three Nikayas.

There are no doctrinal differences between these three Nikayas and thus, they should be known as fraternities rather than sects.

Revival of the Theravada Bhikkhuni Sangha

After having disappeared for almost a thousand years, the Order of Theravada nuns has been revived in Sri Lanka in recent years. Prior to this, women could not ordain and could only be what are called Dasa Sil Matas, or Ten Precept Mothers. This group was founded in 1903 by Catherine de Alwis who became a Dasa Sila Mata in Burma.

Many people, both lay and Sangha, realized that this was unfair to women and inconsistent with the Buddhist spirit of equality between the genders. It was also not in keeping with the Buddha's fourfold division of his disciples, that is, monks and nuns, lay men and lay women.

Historically, Sinhalese nuns from Anuradhapura had established the

bhikkhuni Sangha in China in 429 CE, where they ordained 300 Chinese women in Nanking. Chinese bhikkhunis therefore trace their lineage to these Sri Lankan nuns. There were at least three groups of nuns and one group of monks who travelled to China around that time.

Today, many senior monks and laity are supportive of the revival of the Sinhalese bhikkhuni Sangha through ordination by Chinese nuns. Although there were a few earlier unsuccessful attempts to do this, the bhikkhuni Sangha was finally restored in December 1996 at Sarnath in India. The Sinhalese nuns returned to Sri Lanka a year later, where they ordained a group of Dasa Sil Matas in Dambulla.

This revival was encouraged by many senior and influential people, among them the heads of the Malwatta and Asgiriya chapters of the Siyam Nikaya who approved of the bhikkhuni ordinations at Dambulla. However, there is still some resistance from several members of the Sinhalese and Thai Sangha, who tend to focus on the technicalities of the ordination procedure rather than the spirit of the Buddha's teachings.

Nonetheless, the island has now become the centre of this revival of the bhikkhuni Sangha, and there are now more than 500 properly ordained Theravadin nuns in Sri Lanka.

One of the most well-known nuns of recent times was Ayya Khema who in 1979, became the first western woman to become a Theravadin bhikkhuni. Born in Germany, she helped establish Buddhist centres in Australia and Germany and wrote more than 20 books, which have subsequently been translated into several languages. She went on to ordain several other Sri Lankan and western nuns before she passed away in 1997.

With more and more women becoming nuns, the Buddha's fourfold Sangha is becoming a reality again.

Going Forth

The tradition of the missionary monks was started by the Buddha himself, as he wandered from place to place teaching. He also encouraged his monks to spread the Dhamma to as many places as possible, for the

benefit and happiness of people everywhere.

Evidence of the Sri Lankan missionary spirit has been found as far back as 428 CE, when a group of Sinhalese monks brought letters and a replica of the Tooth Relic to the Emperor of China. It was also recorded in 456 CE during the Wei Dynasty, that no one could make statues of the Buddha as well as Nandi, a Sri Lankan monk living in China at that time.

A branch of the Abhyagiri monastery dating to the late 8th century, was found in central Java, attesting to the presence of Sri Lankan missionary monks in Indonesia. Arantasri, a Sri Lankan monk, travelled to Tibet in the early 13th century and translated Pali texts to Tibetan. In the 15th century, a monk named Dharmadivakara travelled to India, Nepal, Tibet and parts of China spreading the Dhamma.

Apart from his work in Sri Lanka, Anagarika Dharmapala established the Maha Bodhi Society to restore control of the Maha Bodhi Temple in India to Buddhists. As the aim of the society was also to restore other sacred Buddhist sites such as Sarnath and Kushinagar, it set up centres in these places, thereby raising the awareness of Buddhism amongst Indians.

The society is still active today, with offices in several countries including the USA. Dharmapala also travelled the world lecturing on Buddhism and founded the London Buddhist Vihara in 1926, the first Theravadin missionary organization in the west.

In America, Venerable Madihe Pannasiha founded the Washington D.C. Buddhist Vihara in 1965, the first Theravada monastic community in the USA. It actively continues to provide courses, meditation retreats and makes Buddhist books easily available through its library.

Dr. Henepola Gunaratana, founded the Bhavana Society Meditation Center in 1982 in West Virginia, the first Theravada forest monastery and retreat center in the USA. Bhante Gunaratana is probably the most well-known Sri Lankan monk in America and is widely recognized as a meditation master who has also authored many books on the subject.

Ven. Narada Mahathera, Ven. Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda and Ven. M.M.

Mahaweera stand out in their work of helping to establish many centres and monasteries in Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia and Singapore. Numerous other Sri Lankan monks have also brought Buddhism to almost every country on earth.

Clearly, these monks have taken the Buddha's instructions to heart, "going forth for the good of the many". More than 2,000 years after Buddhism arrived in Sri Lanka, its missionary monks have in-turn, spread Buddhism throughout the world in a way that would have done both King Asoka and Ven. Mahinda proud.



Ven. Narada Mahathera

Possibly the most energetic Sinhalese missionary ever, Ven. Narada travelled to every continent in the world except for Antarctica, and was the first Theravadin monk to set foot in many of the countries he visited. Born in 1898, he spent 50 years as a missionary and authored several authoritative books, some of which are still widely used today, such as "The Buddha and his Teachings" and "A Manual of Abhidhamma".

He was the first resident monk of the London Buddhist Vihara and also travelled extensively throughout Europe, America and Africa. In Asia, he frequently visited Indonesia, Vietnam, Nepal and Singapore. He was especially active in Indonesia and the Theravada revival in this country can be traced to his numerous visits there. A vegetarian, he impressed many people with his gentle and friendly demeanour. Ven. Narada passed away in 1982.



Ven. Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda

The year 1952 marked a significant event for Malaysian Buddhists, with the arrival of Ven. Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda from Sri Lanka. Born in 1918, he is considered the father of Theravada Buddhism in Malaysia because of his great works promoting the Dhamma there. He resided at the Brickfields Temple (now known as the Buddhist

Mahavihara) in Kuala Lumpur, which conducts many Buddhist educational programs. Ven. Dhammananda subsequently established the Buddhist Missionary Society to propagate the Dhamma through books and other publications. It also actively organizes seminars and talks, as well as youth training and welfare activities.

Ven. Dhammananda's immense contribution was the writing and publishing of numerous and popular books in English that were given out for free, or for a nominal sum. This allowed the English educated public in Malaysia and Singapore to learn Buddhism and practice it correctly. His writings have also been translated to many languages and made available all over the world. He passed away in 2006 after 54 years of spreading the Dhamma in Malaysia and beyond.

Ven. M.M. Mahaweera Maha Nayaka Thera

Born in 1913, Ven. M.M. Mahaweera came to Singapore in 1934 to cater to the needs of its Sri Lankan expatriates. He helped to establish the Sri Lankaramaya Temple in 1952 and subsequently founded the Mangala Vihara Buddhist Temple in 1960. The temple allows only vegetarian food on its premises in observance of the Buddha's teachings on harmlessness and compassion, and also in deference to Ven. Mahaweera who was a strict vegetarian. In 1993, he set up the Buddhist and Pali College, which is affiliated to the Buddhist and Pali University of Sri Lanka, with Ven. P. Gnanarama Thera Ph.D. as its principal.



Due to the great foresight of Ven. Mahaweera, Mangala Vihara is now the foremost Theravadin educational institution in Singapore. It offers Sunday school classes based on the syllabus of the Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) of Colombo, with programs for adults and children. Through the Buddhist and Pali College, it also makes available tertiary Buddhist studies, from Diploma up to Master of Arts level. Ven. Mahaweera passed away in 2002.



PART TWO

- Yapahuwa
- Avukana
- Anuradhapura
- Mihintale
- Sigiriya
- Polonnaruwa
- Dambulla
- Kandy
- Aluvihara
- Sri Pada
- Colombo



Yapahuwa

Yapahuwa Rock Fortress

Located about 130 kilometres from Colombo, or about a 3 ½ hour drive, is one of Sri Lanka's ancient capitals. This is the Yapahuwa Rock Fortress, which is built on the side of a huge 90 metre high boulder. During a period of political instability, King Bhuvanekabahu I moved his capital to Yapahuwa in 1272, taking with him the sacred Tooth Relic. After his death, the fortress fell into obscurity and was eventually abandoned.

The stone staircase leading to the remains of the Tooth Temple half way up the rock is the most impressive feature of the Fortress, and it is embellished with beautiful friezes of musicians, dancers and drummers. There are also well-preserved guardstones and animal statuettes. On reaching the top, the visitor is rewarded with a panoramic view of the surrounding area, as well as a close-up view of the doorway that once led into the Tooth Temple.

At the foot of the rock is a monastery and a small museum which contains some statues and various antiquities. There is also a collection of ancient Chinese coins and pottery from the Sung Dynasty, which shows that Bhuvanekabahu had some contact with China. To access the museum, request the key from one of the caretaker monks who will usually oblige. The large and ornate golden key is itself an interesting artifact.



The Yapahuwa rock and monastery



The staircase with carvings and statuettes along the side



Some of the statues in the museum



The golden key

Avukana

Avukana Buddha Statue

Near the village of Avukana, located in the Anuradhapura district, stands the tallest Buddha statue in Sri Lanka. The Avukana Buddha statue is almost 12 metres high and is carved out from a granite cliff. It is almost free-standing, being joined to the cliff by just a narrow piece of rock.

It is commonly believed that this statue was constructed sometime in the 5th century, during the reign of King Dhatusena. Although carved more than a thousand years ago, the Avukana Buddha statue is in extremely good condition, with its features and details still very sharp and clear. Despite its size, it was very delicately carved, resulting in an image of finesse and grace.

To give a sense of the statue's size, a person of average height would stand as tall as its toes. It is so well crafted that raindrops will flow down vertically and land right between the feet of the statue.



The Aukana Buddha statue



Close-up of the statue showing its finely carved robes



Anuradhapura

Anuradhapura

Located in the north-west of the island, Anuradhapura was the capital of Sri Lanka for 1,400 years. It is slightly more than 200 kilometres from Colombo and a drive of around 6 hours. Anuradhapura gained much greater prominence with the advent of Buddhism on the island, after which many significant buildings and monasteries were constructed.

The three greatest monasteries of Sri Lanka, the Mahavihara, the Abhayagiri and the Jetavana, were all located in Anuradhapura. Visitors will see mainly the ruins of these monasteries and other structures associated with them. All the other buildings have long since disappeared.

Due to its vulnerability to attacks from South Indian raiders, Anuradhapura gradually lost its importance by the 9th century, and the political seat of the island shifted south-east to Polonnaruwa. It was abandoned by the 11th century and swallowed by the jungle, lost for almost a thousand years. The city and its important ruins were rediscovered only in the early 19th century with the help of the British.

Ruvanvalisaya

Simply known also as the Great Stupa, the Ruvanvalisaya was constructed by Dutthagamani after he became king in 161 BCE. This was his most ambitious project and it is said that one of the architects designed the dome to resemble a bubble of milk. Sadly, the king did not live to see the completion of the stupa.

When it was finally completed, it was one of the wonders of the ancient world, with a diameter of 90 metres at the base and a height of 91 metres. The compound of the stupa is surrounded by four walls with elephant figures made into them. It is believed that relics of the Buddha are enshrined within the stupa.

The Ruvanvalisaya was also designed with the teachings of the Buddha in mind. Its dome signifies the vastness of the doctrine, the four facets above it represent the Four Noble Truths, the concentric rings indicate the Noble Eightfold Path, and the large crystal at the pinnacle represents the ultimate Buddhist goal of enlightenment.

Sri Maha Bodhi

When a number of women wanted to become nuns shortly after the conversion of King Devanampiya Tissa and the royal family, Sanghamitta, the sister of Ven. Mahinda came to the island to start the Order of bhikkhunis. She brought with her a branch of the sacred Bodhi Tree from India, under which the Buddha meditated and attained enlightenment.

This branch was planted in 288 BCE in Sri Maha Bodhi, or the Mahabodhi Temple, and the tree is believed to be the oldest living planted tree in the world. It is one of the most sacred and venerated relics in Sri Lanka.



The Ruvanvalisaya Stupa



A section of the Elephant Wall



A procession heading for the Sri Maha Bodhi



Entrance to the Sri Maha Bodhi



The sacred Bodhi Tree



One of the beautiful guardstones on the steps to the Bodhi Tree



Devotees lighting oil lamps outside the Sri Maha Bodhi

The Brazen Palace

The Brazen Palace, or Lohapadasa, was first built by King Devanampiya Tissa in the 3rd century BCE. It was later redesigned as a chapter house, or sima hall, by King Dutthagamani for the Mahavihara. One side of the building was 120 metres long and it had a thousand rooms in its nine stories.

It is called the Brazen Palace because its roof was once covered with sheets of gilt bronze. Made primarily of wood, it burned down several times and was rebuilt for the last time by King Parakramabahu I in the 12th century. A total of 1,600 stone pillars supported the structure, most of which can still be seen today.

The Thuparama

This was the first such stupa constructed following the introduction of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Built by King Devanampiya Tissa, it believed to enshrine the collar-bone of the Buddha. The stupa was destroyed several times and although originally constructed in the shape of a heap of rice, it was rebuilt in 1862 in the shape of a bell. The octagonal pillars around the Thuparama once supported a dome over it.

Mahasena's Pavillion

This location is known for its beautiful moonstone, the finest and most well-preserved in Sri Lanka. Moonstones are usually found at the entrances or at the bottom of stairways to temples and other important Buddhist buildings. They are characteristic of ancient Sinhalese artwork. Stepping over a moonstone into a temple signifies one's passage from the mundane towards the path of enlightenment.

In this excellent example, the outermost ring of flower petals signifies the fires of worldly existence, and the elephant, lion, horse and bull represent birth, disease, decay and death. In the adjacent ring, the scroll of leaves and flowers mean desire and craving, and further inwards, the geese represent those who have left their worldly attachments. The next ring of leaves and flowers indicate the heavenly worlds and finally, the innermost arc of lotuses signify the accomplishment of Nibbana.



The Brazen Palace



The Thuparama and its octagonal pillars



Remains of Mahasena's Pavillion



The finest ancient moonstone in Sri Lanka

The Abhayagiri

The Abhayagiri Monastery was built by King Vattagamini Abhaya in 88 BCE after regaining his throne. He constructed it over a Jain monastery, fulfilling a vow made after being mocked by a Jain ascetic while fleeing for his life from South Indian invaders. It was the largest monastery in Sri Lanka for over 600 years and at its peak, housed as many as 5,000 monks.

The Abhayagiri stupa was built by King Gajabahu I in the 2nd century CE, and stands 72 metres high with a diameter of 94 metres. The Chinese pilgrim Fa-Hien described the stupa as being covered with gold and jewels when he visited it in 412 CE. After falling into neglect and covered by the jungle, it was rediscovered by the British in 1828.

The Samadhi Buddha statue

Made in the 4th century and about 1.75 metres high, the Samadhi Buddha statue is one of the best examples of Sri Lankan sculpture. The statue shows the Buddha sitting cross-legged in a meditating, or 'Samadhi' posture. Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, derived strength from looking at a picture of this statue during his imprisonment by the British.

The Twin Ponds

These were large bathing tanks that catered to the needs of the monks and staff of the Abhayagiri and were built around the 8th century. Water was filtered several times before flowing into the ponds through a dragon-headed spout. Other noteworthy features are the beautiful carvings around the ponds and the snake-shaped guard stones.

The Jetavana Stupa

This colossal stupa was built by King Mahasena towards the end of the 4th century and is considered the largest stupa in the world. It was originally about 160 metres tall and an estimated 93 million bricks were needed in its construction. It is believed that a part of the Buddha's belt is enshrined within this stupa. Surrounding it is a huge terrace capable of accommodating up to 30,000 devotees. The Jetavana Stupa is an excellent example of ancient Sri Lankan engineering and construction.

The Isurumuniya Temple

This temple was built by King Devanampiya Tissa for 500 children of noble birth to reside in, after they were ordained. Housed within the nearby museum is the famous 6th century carving called the "Isurumuniya Lovers".



The Abhayagiri undergoing restoration works



Admiring the Samadhi Buddha statue



The Twin Ponds



The Jetavana Stupa



The Isurumuniya Temple



The famous "Isurumuniya Lovers" carving



Mihintale

Mihintale

The sacred mountain of Mihintale lies just 12 kilometres away from Anuradhapura and is the site where Buddhism was first introduced to Sri Lanka. Mihintale in the Pali language means simply 'Mahinda's Peak', denoting the location where Ven. Mahinda first met King Devanampiya Tissa in 247 BCE before converting him and his followers to Buddhism. Part of a mountain range 300 metres high, it is now a sacred site for pilgrims with many stupas and other places of religious and historical significance.

The Kantaka Cetiya

Dating to around the 1st century BCE, this small stupa is located a short distance away from the main pilgrimage areas of Mihintale. It is decorated with carvings of elephant, geese and dwarfs. Monks lived in the nearby caves around the stupa.

The Refectory

The remains of this dining area for monks is almost 19 metres long and more than 7 metres wide. There was an elaborate drainage system with large stone rice troughs where monks collected their food before taking their meal elsewhere to eat.

The Great Staircase

A long 122 metre staircase with 1,840 steps leads to several monasteries and stupas, and eventually to the main terraces at the top of Mihintale. The steps are cut from granite, and nearby are the remains of an ancient hospital and medicinal baths meant for monks.

The Ambatthala Stupa

This small stupa is traditionally believed to mark the exact spot of the first meeting between Ven. Mahinda and King Devanampiya Tissa. It is also said to enshrine some of Ven. Mahinda's ashes. Along its side is a stone with a symbol of the Buddha's footprint. Nearby are some caves containing statues representing various scenes of the famous meeting.



The Kantaka Cetiya



Part of the wall carvings



The Refectory



Near the top of the Great Staircase



The Ambatthala Stupa



Looking at a tableau of the first meeting

The Mahaseya Stupa

Right at the summit of Mihintale is a huge bubble-shaped white stupa built in the 1st century CE. It is 44 metres high with a diameter of 41 metres, and relics of the Buddha are believed to be enshrined within it. Right next to this stupa is a much smaller one called the Mahinda Stupa, where some of his remains are enshrined.

The Rock of Invitation

Across from the Mahaseya Stupa is the “Rock of Invitation” on which, according to tradition, Ven. Mahinda and his companions landed after travelling through the air from India using their psychic powers. There is a panoramic and breath-taking view of the surrounding area from the top of the rock. It is also known as the Aradhana Gala.

The Cave of Ven. Mahinda

Back on level ground is a path leading down to the forest along the eastern side of the mountain. Ven. Mahinda resided in one of the caves along this path, which has a raised slab representing his folded robe.

The “Black Water Pond”

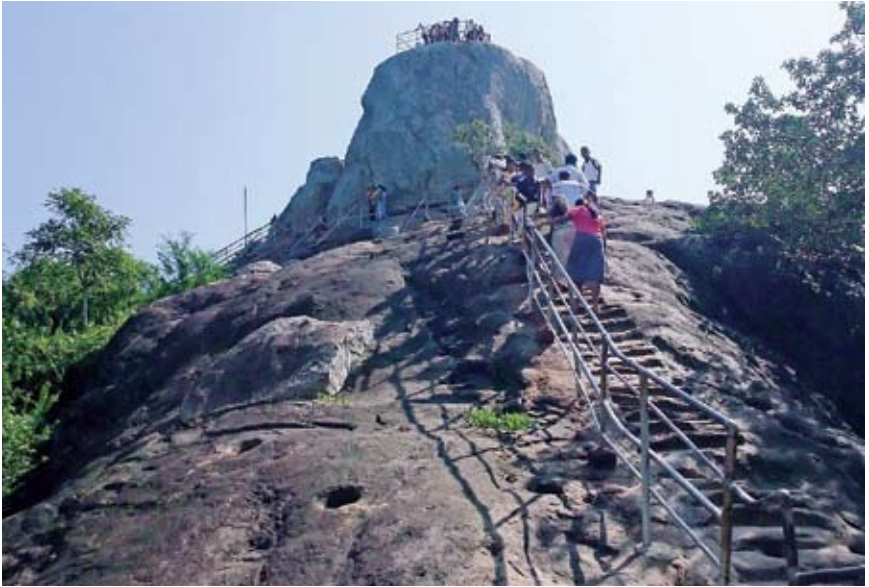
One of the most beautiful and serene lakes in Sri Lanka is a short distance away from Mihintale. It is locally called Kaludiya Pokuna, and the lake is named because the water appears to be black when seen from some angles.



The Mahaseya Stupa



The Mahinda Stupa



Ascending the “Rock of Invitation”



A view of the countryside from the top



The cave of Ven. Mahinda



The “Black Water Pond”



Sigiriya

Sigiriya Rock Fortress

Built on a sheer-sided volcanic plug rising 200 metres above the surrounding jungle, the Sigiriya Rock Fortress is possibly Sri Lanka's most impressive attraction. Known also as the "Lion's Rock", it is one of the island's seven UNESCO Heritage sites, featuring extensive gardens, stairways, galleries, caves and other structures.

According to the Sri Lankan Chronicles, Sigiriya was the fortress-palace built by King Kassapa I in the late 5th century. Kassapa put his father to death in a rebellion and fearing the revenge of his brother, abandoned Anuradhapura as his capital and built this fortress to protect himself. Nonetheless, he ultimately committed suicide during a battle with the invading forces of his brother.

However, a more recent school of thought suggests that Sigiriya was not a fortress or a palace, but a great Mahayana monastic complex. Inscriptions dating from the 3rd century BCE found in the caves surrounding the area indicate the presence of ascetic monks, and it is possible that Sigiriya became a branch of the Abhayagiri Vihara and continued to function as a monastery for hundreds of years.

The Water Gardens

These are a series of striking and elaborate pools, symmetrically placed and fed by a complex system of underground pipes. Attesting to the ingenuity of the ancient hydraulic engineers, some of the fountains of the garden are still in working order. These gardens, according to the traditional accounts, were the bathing places of the king's concubines who were drawn from many different races.

The Gallery of Maidens

Two of the main attractions of Sigiriya are reached after climbing a spiral staircase built along the sheer cliff wall. The colourful frescoes of graceful ladies painted on the side of the rock are likely the most beautiful and well-preserved of ancient Sri Lankan art. There are references to around 500 of these figures but only 22 of these remain. Some say they are Apsaras, or celestial nymphs, while others contend that they are Mahayana deities such as Tara and her attendants.

The Mirror Wall

Just beyond the gallery is a wall covered with ancient graffiti which originally had an extraordinary mirror-like polish. Visitors from more than a thousand years ago wrote on the wall their impressions of the paintings, as well as their experiences and thoughts on Sigiriya. There are more than 700 poems amongst this graffiti, many written in very neat and precise lettering.



The Sigiriya Rock from afar



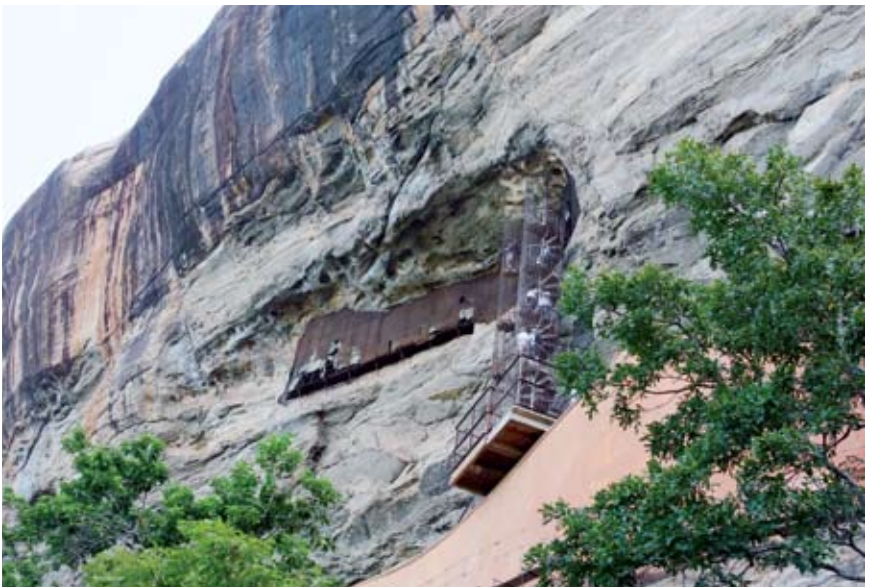
The Water Gardens kept in good repair



Pointing up the sheer side of the Sigiriya Rock



A cave for meditating monks cut into the rock



The route up to the Gallery and Mirror Wall



Maiden or deity?

The Lion Staircase

On the large terrace near the top of the rock are two huge lion paws, the remains of an enormous lion-shaped entrance. Sigiriya takes its name from this brick lion, and visitors would have had to enter between its paws and climb up through its mouth to reach its peak. It is estimated that this structure rose to a height of about 14 metres.

The Summit

The remains of the foundations at the summit shows that it was once covered with palaces, pavilions, halls and ponds. It is still unknown how the ancient engineers pumped water up the height of the rock. The plateau covers an area of about 16,000 square metres and offers magnificent views from all sides. Particularly breathtaking is the bird's eye view of the Water Gardens and surrounding pathways showing their precise and geometrical layout.

The Boulder Garden

On the way down are paths and stairways winding through clusters of large boulders and rocks. The striking feature of this garden is that many of these had a hall or pavilion cut into them. However, the walls and columns of these structures no longer exist. Fragments of paintings can still be seen in some of these shelters. Near the bottom is a tall and impressive rock that resembles a cobra about to strike.



The Lion Paws



Taking a rest on the ruins at the summit



A breathtaking view from the peak



One of the remaining ponds near the plateau



An audience hall in the Boulder Garden



The imposing Cobra Hood Rock



Polonnaruwa

Polonnaruwa

This city was the second great capital of Sri Lanka after Anuradhapura and is located about 100 kilometres to the south-east. Its prominence as the capital lasted for about 300 years, during which a number of major Buddhist structures were made. But while they were built in a later age, these structures were lesser in size and magnificence to those of more ancient times. Nonetheless, most of these are beautiful and significant.

By the 13th century, Polonnaruwa became increasingly vulnerable to attacks from the north by Indian invaders, and was almost destroyed by decades of invasions and civil wars. Subsequent kings gradually shifted their capitals towards the south-west, and like Anuradhapura before it, Polonnaruwa was eventually abandoned. This ancient city is designated a World Heritage site by UNESCO.

The Sea of Parakrama

Although without any religious significance, this reservoir is possibly Polonnaruwa's most impressive feature. It was constructed during the reign of King Parakramabahu I in the late 12th century and served both as a defence against invaders and as a supply of water for both the city and for irrigation. Reservoirs in Sri Lanka are somewhat incongruously called 'tanks' and some of them, like the Sea of Parakrama, are so big they are actually more like inland seas.

In fact, this reservoir covers more than 22 square kilometres and is comprised of three huge bodies of water connected together. This was an incredible feat of ancient engineering which has to be seen to be believed. It fell into disrepair following the decline of the city but was restored in recent times. The lake now irrigates more than 72 square kilometres of rice fields.

The Quadrangle of the Temple of the Tooth

Just before the Quadrangle lies the remains of Parakramabahu's seven storeyed Victory Palace. Only its 3 metre thick walls still stand. Within this Quadrangle is the Vatadage, an elegant temple which consists of two concentric stone terraces encircling a number of Buddha statues in the Samadhi, or meditation, posture. At the four entrances are beautifully carved moonstones and guardstones, making this the finest temple in Polonnaruwa. Just across is a second temple, the Atadage, where the Tooth Relic was housed on the upper floor. The most complete structure of the Quadrangle is the Thuparama, which originally contained a seated Buddha image.



A small section of the Sea of Parakrama seen from a luxury hotel



A statue of King Parakramabahu I



Remains of the Victory Palace



The Vatadage with its guardstones and moonstone



Entrance to the Atadage



The Thuparama being restored

The Gal Vihara

Some of the finest Buddha statues in Sri Lanka are found in the Gal Vihara, or “Rock Temple”, where four Buddha images are carved from the face of a single granite rock. There is a very impressive 5 metre high seated image with an elaborate halo behind its head, and next to it is a similar but much smaller one in a recess. On a rock between the recess and the standing image is an inscription describing Parakramabahu’s efforts to reform the Sangha in 1165.

Next is a large standing image about 7 metres tall. Because of its unusual posture with its hands folded across its chest, some people believe that this image is not of the Buddha, but of Ananda, his personal attendant.

At the end of the cliff is a massive reclining statue just over 14 metres long. This statue shows the Buddha at rest as he enters into final Nibbana. The flow of the robes, the pillow and the feet of the statue are all exquisitely carved. The face also has a most peaceful and serene smile.



The seated image



The small image in the recess



The standing and reclining images

Dambulla

The Golden Rock Temple

Although there are numerous cave temples in Sri Lanka, the Golden Rock Temple a few kilometres south of the market town of Dambulla, is its most famous and spectacular. The town is about 72 kilometres north of Kandy, and the temple is in a cave under a range of granite hillocks which rise 160 metres above the surrounding plains.

It is believed that when King Vattagamini was fleeing from his enemies in the 1st century BCE, he was sheltered by ascetic monks who lived in these caves. After returning to power, he came back to build a large rock temple in gratitude to the monks. The caves were further enlarged by King Nissankamalla in the 12th century, with five temples built into them.

There are more than a hundred statues of the Buddha within the temples, along with a few of kings and various deities. There are also murals on the walls depicting scenes from the Buddha's life, some painted as recently as the 18th and 19th centuries, and these cover an area of 2,100 square metres.



The entrances to the various cave temples



The Dambulla Cave Temple Stupa



A mural of the Buddha sheltered by the Naga King



The Buddha resting on a pillow



A row of Buddha statues with a background of colourful wall paintings

Kandy

Kandy

The city of Kandy is located 116 kilometres from Colombo. It is 465 metres above sea-level and nestled in the mountainous central region of the island. First established in the mid 14th century, the city resisted many invasions by the Portuguese and Dutch, who occupied most of the island from the 16th century onwards.

Kandy remained the last independent capital of Sri Lanka until the reign of Sri Vikrama Rajasinha, when it came under British rule in 1815. The seats of power then shifted to the coastal areas of Kotte and Colombo. However, it is still considered the religious and cultural centre of the country, with numerous temples and monasteries, Buddhist colleges and beautiful parks and gardens.

The Lankatilaka Temple is known for its traditional Sinhalese architecture and was built in 1344 atop a rocky and uneven hilltop. The Embekke Devale, constructed in the 14th century, is famous for its wooden structure and beautifully intricate woodcarvings. Another popular temple in Kandy is the Gadaladeniya Temple which was built in a South Indian style.



The Lankatilaka Temple



Embekke Devale



An intricate woodcarving on a rafter

The Temple of the Tooth

The most famous attraction in Kandy is the Temple of the Tooth, or “Sri Dalada Maligawa”. The Buddha’s Tooth was first brought to Kandy during the reign of Vimaladharmasuriya I at the turn of the 17th century. He built a temple to house the relic but this was later destroyed. It was taken away for safety during a Portuguese invasion of Kandy and eventually recovered during the rule of King Rajasingha II.

The present Temple of the Tooth was built in the early 18th century by King Vira Narendra Sinha, and later extended and modified by subsequent kings. Externally, it is surrounded by a moat and low white walls with simple carvings. Its distinctive Octagonal Tower, or “Pattiripuwa”, was built in 1803 and houses a collection of palm-leaf manuscripts.

The Tooth is kept in a two-storey shrine which is covered with a golden canopy and fronted by a set of huge elephant tusks. There is also a museum where many Buddha images are kept, most of them gifts from different countries. Also displayed are paintings depicting the various events in the history of the Tooth.

Thousands of devotees and visitors throng the shrine everyday to pay respects to the Tooth, which is encased within a set of seven caskets made of gold and precious gems. There is an air of great excitement and anticipation among the crowd as the people await their turn to file past the Tooth. There is usually not much more time than for a quick look as the attendants keep the crowd moving at a fast pace.

A replica of the Tooth, together with its ornate and beautiful caskets, is displayed once a year during the “Esala Perahera”. This is the island’s largest annual celebration, lasting for ten days, with colourful and elaborate parades of dancers, drummers and elephants. Around a million people attend this festival each year. Due to security concerns, the actual Tooth is never brought out for the festival.



The exterior of the Tooth Temple



The passageway to the interior



The beautiful golden canopy over the shrine



Devotees waiting to enter the chamber where the Tooth is kept



The gold and jewelled casket which houses the Tooth



The museum with Buddha images and paintings

Aluvihara

The Aluvihara Cave Temple

Just 32 kilometres north of Kandy is a small cave temple highly significant to the history of Buddhism. During the 1st century BCE, the island was ravaged by anarchy and starvation, and the very survival of Buddhism was threatened. This was because at that time, its teachings were orally transmitted by monks, and many had died or left the island.

Some of the surviving monks then decided to commit the whole of the Tipitaka to writing. The Fourth Buddhist Council was convened and as a result, it was written down for the first time in the island's history. In this way, the teachings were preserved in their original form and Buddhism survived this difficult period. The momentous event was held at the Aluvihara Cave Temple, originally known as the Aloka Lena, or "Cave of Light".



The approach to the Aluvihara



A statue of Buddhaghosha, the great Buddhist commentator



A scene of the Fourth Buddhist Council



Strips of ola leaves being processed for writing



An example of writing on an ola leaf



Some attractively bundled ola leaf texts



A collection of the Tipitaka



Sri Pada

The Sacred Mountain

Located about 122 kilometres due east from Colombo is the sacred mountain Sri Pada. It is situated in the southern reaches of the Central highlands, and adjacent to extensive wildlife reserves. With no other comparable mountains nearby, Sri Pada rises prominently above the surrounding area, soaring to a height of 2,243 metres above sea-level.

It is easily Sri Lanka's most revered site, considered sacred not only by Buddhists, but also by Christians, Muslims and Hindus. At the top of the mountain is a slab of rock with a large indentation believed to be the Buddha's footprint, which he left during his legendary third visit to the island.

Centuries later, Christians and Muslims developed the belief that this indentation was the footprint of Adam. Thus, Sri Pada is also commonly known as Adam's Peak. The Hindus, according to their own belief, revere the spot as the footprint of Shiva.

The climbing season is between December and May, as the heavy rains and strong winds during the other parts of the year make the ascent difficult and very risky. Climbers usually set off in the night to take advantage of the cool temperatures, and time their ascent to reach the summit before daybreak. The trek starts off in a gradual fashion but becomes more and more strenuous as the climb becomes an almost continuous journey of going up steep, but usually broad steps.

Along the way are dozens of small but colourful and brightly lit tea houses and shops which break the monotony of the climb, and actually make it quite interesting. These are useful places to take a rest and sip a hot drink. On reaching the peak, there will usually be a huge crowd queuing up to pay respects at the shrine housing the footprint.

After witnessing the magical sunrise on Sri Pada, the crowd disperses and makes its way down. The whole trek may take about five to six hours for the fit, but many people opt for a more leisurely walk of about eight to ten hours.



Sri Pada from a nearby rest house



Listening to a Dhamma talk along the way



One of the many 'hotels' on the way up to the peak



A small part of the huge crowd awaiting the sunrise



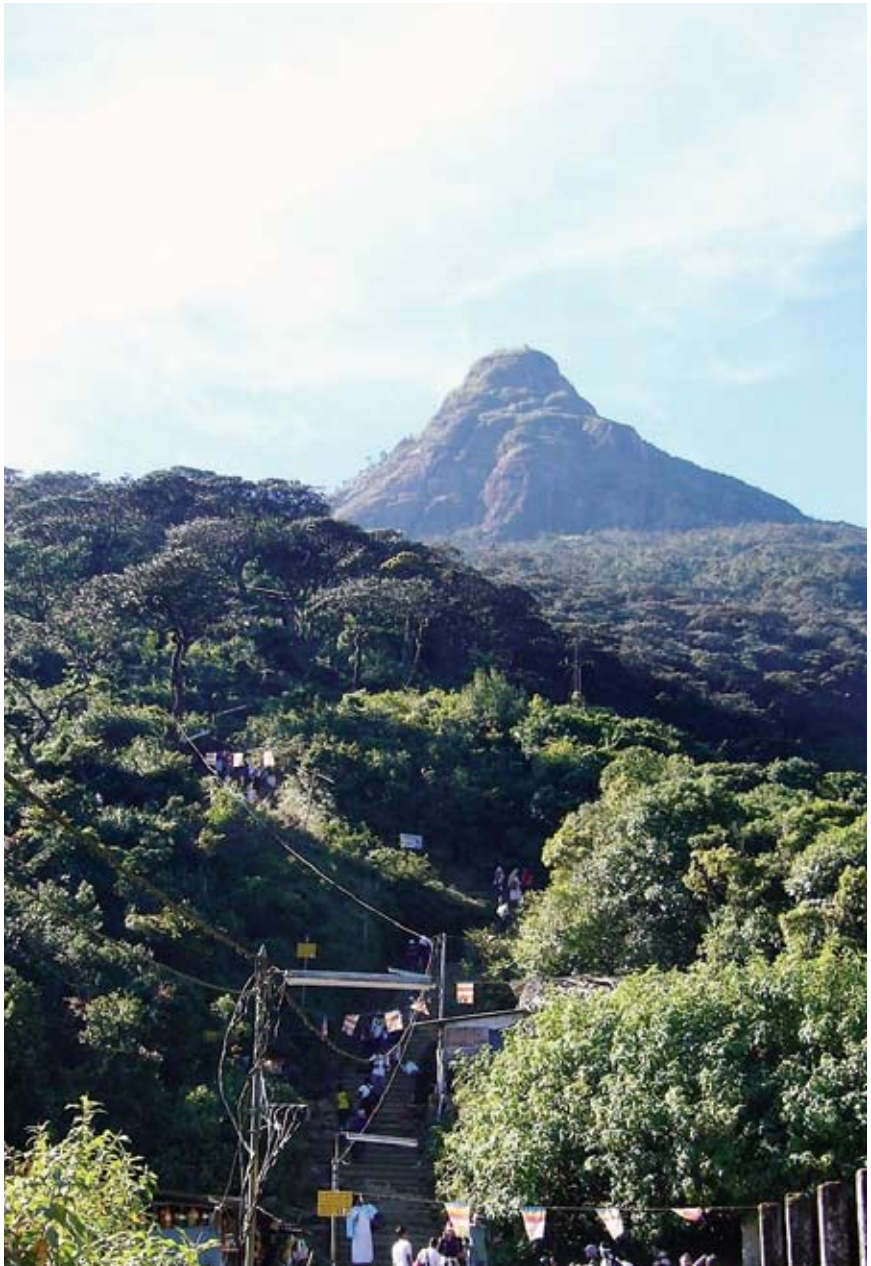
The moment of sunrise on Sri Pada



Sri Pada's perfectly triangular silhouette



The long trek down



A final view of the peak

Colombo

Colombo

Located on the west coast of the island, Colombo is Sri Lanka's largest city and its commercial hub. It was the administrative capital of the Portuguese, Dutch and British when they ruled the island, and its national capital until the 1980's.

The brand new premises of the Buddhist and Pali University of Sri Lanka are located in its outskirts and is comprised of lecture halls, classrooms, a three storey library and other common facilities. Prominent temples in the Colombo area include the Kelaniya Temple, the Gotami Temple and the Bellanwila Temple.

The Kelaniya Temple

This temple is located in the village of Kelaniya just a few kilometres away from Colombo and close-by to the Kelani River. It is famous for being visited by the Buddha during his legendary trips to Sri Lanka. In the 15th century, when King Dhammaceti of Burma doubted the purity of the ordination in his country, he sent monks to Kelaniya to re-ordain under the Sri Lankan Sangha.

The temple was destroyed by the Portuguese in the 16th century but rebuilt in the 18th century when the island was under the more tolerant Dutch. A prominent feature of the temple is a tall and graceful statue of Ganga, the goddess of the Ganges, India's most sacred river. It is also renowned for its extensive and beautiful wall murals depicting scenes of Buddhism's early history and development in Sri Lanka.



A part of the new Buddhist and Pali University campus



The Kelaniya Temple



A quiet read with Ganga



One of the beautiful paintings in the temple



Conclusion

Looking back through the centuries since Buddhism first arrived in Sri Lanka, we can see numerous periods of popularity, decline and revival. There were times when it was flourishing, and also times when it came close to dying out.

It is vital for all Buddhists to be aware of these events. We must learn these lessons from the past and realize how the people of Sri Lanka rose to these challenges. We should be familiar with how they persevered, overcame all adversities, and eventually ensured the survival and resurgence of Buddhism on their island.

We too must do our part to prevent it falling into similar declines in the future. We can do this by making an effort to learn its history, its proper teachings and practice them with diligence and sincerity. We can also help by setting good examples, keeping up with its developments, and sharing its teachings for the benefit of our respective communities.

We should also take the opportunity to visit the ancient and sacred places of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, to see and feel for ourselves how it took root, declined and flourished again. We can then realize that the conditions for Buddhism were not always as ideal as they are now. In this way, we can better appreciate the wonderful environment in the present for us to learn and practice the Dhamma.

Buddhism is now in very much of a golden age. Never in its history of more than two and a half millenia has the Dhamma spread so far and so widely. Practically every corner of the world has now been touched by the Buddha's teachings. This great unfolding is in no small part due to the monks and the people of Sri Lanka.

The island had a variety of different names throughout its history, and its present name also has different meanings. One such meaning is "Resplendent Island", and resplendent means shining, dazzling and

glorious. I have thus chosen to title this book “Island of Light”, because Sri Lanka is the island from which the light of the Buddha’s Dhamma shines forth strongly and brightly onto the world.

It is up to all of us now to assist and contribute towards this growing worldwide awareness and popularity of Buddhism, and make a long-lasting success of it. We must not waste this opportunity but use our lives and our resources wisely, to learn, practice and share the teachings of Buddhism to ensure its continued survival, success and dissemination.

May each and every Buddhist also become an “Island of Light” to the world, spreading the truth and beauty of the Buddha’s teachings, for the benefit and happiness of all beings everywhere.

Pilgrimage and photographs

All the photos of Sri Lanka, including the front and back covers, were taken during a Pilgrimage trip in 2009. The photos were taken by the writer and his friends using ordinary ‘point-and-shoot’ digital cameras. Sincere thanks to Arlene Tay, Horace Ho, Ng Lay Hoon, Peter Thong and Shirley Ow for their contributions. Many thanks also to Ven. Dr. Indasara Thero and our tour guide, Mr. Dudley Perera, for helping to make the trip a most successful and enjoyable one.



References and recommended further reading

- Agarwal, C.V. The Buddhist and Theosophical Movements, 1873-2001 (Varanasi, 2001)
- Bapat, P.V., ed. 2500 Years of Buddhism (Delhi, 1956)
- Bhattacharya, Sandhya State of Buddhism in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) as Depicted in the Pali Chronicles (Varanasi, 2009)
- Bischoff, Roger Buddhism in Myanmar, A Short History (Kandy, 1995)
- Bond, George D. The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka (Delhi, 1992)
- Conze, Edward A Short History of Buddhism (London, 1980)
- de Silva, K.M. A History of Sri Lanka (Colombo, 2005)
- Dhammika, Shravasti Sacred Island (Kandy, 2008)
- Gombrich, Richard Theravada Buddhism (London, 1988)
- Gombrich, Richard and Obeyesekere, Gananath Buddhism Transformed (Delhi, 1990)
- Haldhar, S.M. Buddhism in Myanmar and Thailand (New Delhi, 2005)

Hazra, Kanai Lal	History of Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka (Calcutta, 1981)
Hazra, Kanai Lal	The Buddhist Annals and Chronicles of South-East Asia (New Delhi, 1981)
Khantipalo, Bikkhu	Banner of the Arahants (Kandy, 1979)
Malalgoda, Kitsiri	Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750-1900 (California, 1976)
Mirando, A.H.	Buddhism in Sri Lanka in the 17 th and 18 th Centuries (Dehiwala, 1985)
Ong, Y.D.	Buddhism in Singapore (Singapore, 2005)
Panabokke, Gunaratne	History of the Buddhist Sangah in India and Sri Lanka (Colombo, 1993)
Phanit, Thakur	Kalyanamitr, Religious and Cultural Ties between Sri Lanka and Thailand (Bangkok, 2001)
Perera, H.R.	Buddhism in Sri Lanka, A Short History (Kandy, 1988)
Rahula, Walpola	History of Buddhism in Sri Lanka (Dehiwala, 1956)
Sangharatana, Talawe	Provincial Gods in Sri Lanka (Gampaha, 2008)
Seneviratne, H.L.	The Work of Kings, The New Buddhism in Sri Lanka (Chicago, 1999)
Young, R.F. and G.P.V. Somaratna	Vain Debates, The Buddhist-Christian Controversies of Nineteenth Century Ceylon (Vienna, 1996)



Basic Buddhism

The Buddha

Siddhattha Gotama was born into the family of a ruling clan about 2,500 years ago. His father was the chief of this clan that lived in northern India close to the border of what is now Nepal. As the only son of the chief, he lived a life of ease and luxury surrounded by riches and women. However, even as a youth he realized that he would get no lasting satisfaction from such a lifestyle.

He began to see that all human existence is unavoidably subject to illness, old age and death. At the age of 29, and inspired by the sight of a calm and dignified hermit, he decided to forgo his luxurious lifestyle. He left his wife and child in the good hands of the royal family to seek the answers to lasting happiness. After 6 years of wandering and severe ascetic practices, he realized that neither a decadent lifestyle nor extreme asceticism will lead him to the answers he sought.

He decided to pursue the 'Middle Way' between these two extremes. He then settled down under a Bodhi tree, relaxed, had a good meal and resolved not to get up until he found the answers. After a night of deep meditation, full understanding came to him. From then on, the Prince became known as the Buddha which means literally, the 'Awakened One'.

The Buddha then spent the next 45 years of his life teaching what he finally came to understand. He founded a community of monks known as the Sangha, and Buddhism spread throughout northern India. Kings, nobles, merchants and peasants became his disciples and followers, and even now countless people everywhere benefit from his Teachings. He passed away peacefully into final Nibbana at the age of 80.

The Four Noble Truths

1. All beings are subject to Dukkha.

Dukkha is usually translated as suffering but it actually encompasses a wide range of negative feelings including stress, dissatisfaction and physical suffering. Dukkha exists as all beings are subject to illness, separation from loved ones, not getting their desires, aging and death.

2. Dukkha arises from desire and craving.

All beings crave pleasant sensations, and also desire to avoid unpleasant sensations. These sensations can be physical or psychological, and dukkha arises when these desires and cravings are not met.

3. Dukkha can be overcome by the elimination of desire and craving.

Nibbana is the state of peace where all greed, hatred and delusion, and thereby dukkha, have been eradicated.

4. There is a way out of dukkha, which is the Noble Eightfold Path.

Dukkha can be reduced, weakened and finally eradicated and Nibbana thereby attained, by following this path as taught by the Buddha.

The Noble Eightfold Path

1. Right Understanding

To understand and accept the Four Noble Truths.

2. Right Thought

To cultivate thoughts of generosity, loving-kindness and compassion.

3. Right Speech

To refrain from lying, slander, harsh words and gossip. To cultivate truthful, peaceful, kind and meaningful speech.

4. Right Action

To abstain from killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. To cultivate harmlessness, honesty and faithfulness.

5. Right Livelihood

To avoid occupations involving killing (of both humans and animals),

the sale of animal flesh, the trading of humans, weapons, poisons and intoxicants. Occupations which are unethical, immoral and illegal should also be avoided.

6. Right Effort

To apply mental discipline to prevent unwholesome thoughts from arising, and to dispel unwholesome thoughts that have arisen. To develop wholesome thoughts, and to maintain those wholesome thoughts that have arisen.

7. Right Mindfulness

To be aware of the body, and bodily postures and sensations. To be aware of the mind and its thoughts, emotions and feelings. To be aware of the Dhamma.

8. Right Concentration

To practice meditation to train the mind to be focused and disciplined in order to cultivate and acquire wisdom.

The Three Marks of Existence

Anicca

All things are impermanent, and everything is in the process of changing into something else. For example, we are all in the process of aging. Even the stars and galaxies are in the process of change.

Dukkha

Because all things are impermanent, existence is subject to dukkha. There will always be the craving for the pleasant, and the aversion to the unpleasant, resulting from the everchanging nature of existence.

Anatta

There is no permanent or unchanging self. The 'self' which we are conditioned to believe exists, is comprised of nothing more than different mental and physical constituents, which are in a state of constant change because of Cause and Effect.

This section on Basic Buddhism is extracted from the booklet 'Anyone can go to Heaven, Just be Good' by T Y Lee : www.justbegood.net



The Gift of the Dhamma is the greatest Gift of all

The significance of sharing the Dhamma

When you share the Dhamma, others will also share the Dhamma with you in your future lives. This is the principle of kamma.

Because the Dhamma can only be shared in the human and heavenly realms, you must be reborn in either of these realms for others to share the Dhamma with you.

Thus, by sharing the Dhamma, you not only give the greatest gift of all, you also help to ensure favourable rebirths for yourself.

More importantly, sharing the Dhamma leads to peace and happiness and eventually to Nibbana, for both the giver and the receiver.

These are the reasons why the gift of the Dhamma is the greatest gift of all.

A daily aspiration

May I always do my best to help protect and spread the teachings of the Buddha for the benefit of all beings;

And may I always continue to learn and practice the true Dhamma until I attain Nibbana.

T Y Lee

More on Buddhism



**FOR FREE
DISTRIBUTION
ONLY**



“Island of Light” takes the reader on a captivating written and pictorial journey through time that not only tells 2,500 years of the fascinating Buddhist history of Sri Lanka, but also gives a taste of the serene and breathtaking majesty of its sacred ancient sites.

Ven. Bhikkuni Bodhicitta Theri, Australia

Being an informative guide, a fountain of pious emotion and a source of history, “Island of Light” is a useful guide for tourists, an intimate companion for pilgrims and a factual reference book for students of the Buddhist history of Sri Lanka.

Ven. Dr. P. Gnanarama Thera, Singapore

ISBN 978-981-08-2666-6

www.justbegood.net